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IN THE BIGHT
OF BENIN

*The Author wishes to take this opportunity
of thanking, for their courtesy, the Editors of
"The Idler," "Black and White," "In Town,"
"To-Day," and "The Sun," in whose Journals
these stories of the West Coast have found a
place.*

Bound flat

IN THE BIGHT OF BENIN

BY

A. J. DAWSON

AUTHOR OF "MERE SENTIMENT," ETC.

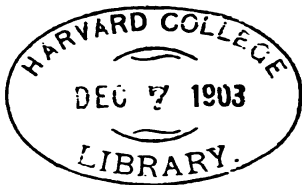


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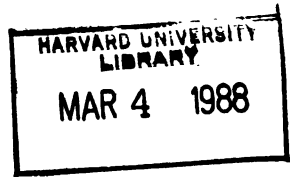
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*To a beautiful woman, some happy
pickaninnies, several "white" negroes,
and a few interesting blackguards,
now resident in West Africa; the
Author sends greetings, and — some
reminiscences.*

LONDON, February 1877.

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IN THE BIGHT OF BENIN

IN THE BIGHT OF BENIN

"There's danger even where fish are caught
To those who a wetting fear;
For what's worth having must aye be bought,
And sport's like life and life's like sport—
It ain't all skittles and beer."

—ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER I

TWO MEN IN THE STREET

It is always hard to say how a row begins in Las Palmas. And, anyway, the Englishman was far too delighted and grateful to find that there was really a row to care one grain of picadura how it came about. He could see that all the orthodox component parts of a row royal were there, and he was not the man to cause unnecessary delays by pushing investigations.

A half-caste Las Palmas woman was in the middle of the crowd, and her white cotton garments were scanty.

Glaring at her, over the heads of half-a-dozen yellow-skinned, black-eyed island-men, each of whom seemed to have gripped some portion of his wiry frame, was a tall, well-made man, who looked like a Southerner and was dressed like an Englishman. His skin was fair enough to be quite in keeping with his clothes of Northern cut and make. But his expletives, after one hurried English oath, were richly redolent of the sunny Mediterranean.

Three knives were drawn; spectators at the little green jalousies overhead shouted their enthusiastic anticipation of a fitting finale; and the tall man was forced down at last on to his knees, hissing and gasping with fury.

It was just at that moment that the Englishman appeared at the corner of the street—a four-foot wide thoroughfare, winding between high walls of glistening whiteness;—and in another instant, he was in the thick of the black and yellow tangle round the individual whose oaths smacked of garlic.

One minute of exhilarating disentanglement, and then “Time!” seemed to have been called and tacitly responded to by all concerned.

The tall man sat, with legs outstretched, in

the soft, red dust; the Englishman stood by his side panting; and about them, in a semicircle, half-a-dozen islanders wiped their yellow faces and drew long breaths before launching into descriptive and explanatory blasphemy.

The Englishman understood not a word of the vernacular, or Spanish either; and he wore the expression of one who, whilst patient and prepared to admire anything novel in vituperation, was yet anxious to proceed with more serious business, if anything in that way were forthcoming.

Mere language having continued for some time, he bent down over the man he had rescued, and said—

“Look here; I don’t know who you are, but you are dressed like an Englishman, and—if I leave you with these friends of yours there may be trouble. Hadn’t you better get up and come and have a drink somewhere?”

“’Isté! you are a good sort, and—cool. Do you know what the row is about?”

The Englishman looked at one of the islanders, who, jabbering in great excitement, was advancing towards him.

“I can hear you just as well, my friend, and

smell you quite plainly enough, at a distance." And he gave the islander a good-humoured shove that sent him reeling towards his friends, and jabbering more incoherently than before.

"You are not afraid of the knife?" muttered the man in the dust admiringly.

The Englishman looked down sharply, and with a little contempt in his blue eyes. "Why, no! Are you? But see here, we'd better go and have that drink before these gentlemen become apoplectic or go and fetch their relations."

So the tall man raised himself from the ground and shook the red dust from his tail-coat.

The island-men advanced a step, and raised their respective voices by an octave.

"You're a bit shaken up, I fancy," said the Englishman to the other. "Walk on ahead by the corner I came round, and I'll follow and talk to our friends."

The tall man made a gesture which might have meant "Thank you;" or possibly, "What a fool you are!"

Then he turned and walked towards the corner of the street, the Englishman stepping backwards after him, like the leader of a Salvation Army band, and muttering playful warnings to

the half-caste Spaniards, who followed him like a flock of hungry, but frightened wolves.

Arrived at the arched corner of the street, the Englishman suddenly became serious, and for the first time since his appearance on the scene, drew a revolver from his hip pocket.

"Don't come any farther, gentlemen, or I shall have to shoot."

There was no mistaking the gesture, though the words were Greek to the island-men.

They did not venture past the corner, but stood in the archway pouring musical curses after the two men, who were slowly walking towards where the narrow street widened into a road outside the cathedral of Las Palmas.

The Englishman did not mention that his revolver was not loaded, but quietly replaced that weapon in his hip pocket as he rejoined his friend on the paved square before the cathedral.

"Where do you drink at this time in the evening?" he asked; as they passed a gorgeously uniformed gendarme, sleeping peacefully in the moonlight, with his sabre propped against his knees.

"I'll take you to a little wine-shop, where we

can stay as long as we like ; and if you'll let me I'll reckon you my guest for to-night, anyhow." The tall man had spruced up a good deal in the walk down the hill from the cathedral.

"Let me introduce myself," he continued, picking a big, gilt-edged card out of his pocket-book and handing it to the Englishman. "I'm proud to meet a man who can play with six half-castes at one time."

"John Albert Menuel" was the name on the gilt-edged card ; and as the Englishman looked at it in the light of one of the lamps on the little bridge in the centre of the town, he said quietly—

"Thank you. My name is Wray."

Then the two men went into a queer, shadowy little wine-shop at the back of the Hotel du Quatro Naciones, and John Albert Menuel led the way up a railed ladder to a kind of loft, where a number of island men and women sat at little tables, drinking thin wine and playing dominoes.

Menuel ordered a flask of the slate-blue wine, and Wray drank with him, for all the world as though he liked it. He had spent most of his life in different colonies and abroad ; and Menuel, though it was his habit to give London the credit

of being his birthplace, was in reality a Maltese Jew, and could drink anything that was liquid.

"Did you wonder how I came to be rowing with an island woman?" he asked, as he offered a cigarette to his new friend.

"No," answered the Englishman. "Not much. You see, I didn't arrive in good time at all, and—I'm not great on wondering, anyhow."

Menuel smiled. He admired this kind of man immensely, and himself assumed a languid tone in unconscious imitation of the Englishman's genuine indifference.

"That woman had arrived somehow at the conclusion that I was her long-lost husband. At least, I fancy so, since she accused me of being the father of her brats. I explained that marriage was not so much in my line as trading, and that I was willing to sell her anything under heaven, but was not buying picaninnies, not at present. Then she began to squall, and the street turned out. They didn't care to understand, and were just getting a thought too many for me—I hadn't a knife about me—when you arrived and scattered them. I'm not a man to fuss round much,

Mister—Wray; but I'm very grateful, and I don't forget a thing like that,—not in one evening."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you to say so, but, Lord! the gratitude's all on my side. The thing did me a world of good, and if they'd only been a couple fewer, and didn't jaw so much, I should have enjoyed another round immensely."

So the two men talked, and Wray became more interested in the life of the man he had saved, as Manuel allowed his natural picturesqueness to over-ride his rendering of what he thought a London business-man's address should be.

Then, when the wine was finished, Manuel suggested a move towards quarters for the night.

"It's very good of you to want to put me up," said Wray; "but I expect you're living somewhere here, and it will be more convenient for you to go alone. Now, I'm just stopping for a few days at the Santa Madroño, and have no one's convenience to study. I think I'll go out there and turn in;—Thanks all the same for your offer—and I've no doubt

I shall have the pleasure of seeing you about the town before I go away."

"I'm all alone, too," said Menuel, "and am only staying a few days in the island on my way to Africa. The Santa Madroño's a long way out. Come with me to the Quatro Naciones, where I'm staying, and let's have a yarn there."

It was the nature of the Englishman to "go along" at all times. So he strolled quietly across the moonlit square to the Hotel du Quatro Naciones, and sat down on the verandah while Menuel tugged at the door-bell.

"'Isté! They don't sleep here; they die when they lie down," said Menuel, as the big bell jangled for the fifth time without an answer. "Let's go round to the back and reconnoitre."

In the garden at the back of the hotel they found a big wooden grating standing open, and walking down the steps under this, they reached a great rambling cellar, full of stores and empty cases. From this the ascent of a rickety ladder brought them through a trap-door into the kitchen of the establishment.

There they lit a candle of prodigious size which stood on the table, and, at Menuel's suggestion, they supped royally on Gruyère cheese,

white rolls, and stewed fruit, these being the commodities nearest to hand.

Menuel, whose habits were of the South, took all this as a matter of course; and at that the Englishman was a good deal amused. Then they walked quietly along the cool, dark corridors of the place, across the central courtyard, where one or two cherub-faced Canary Island boys lay sleeping amongst the dogs and calabashes; and up a flight of winding stairs to Menuel's room, which boasted a fine broad couch, as well as a bed, hidden under a mosquito bar.

"May I ask questions?" said the tall man, when they had arrayed themselves in pyjamas, and had sat down to smoke.

"Go ahead," replied the other at the end of a big, cool puff of picadura smoke.

"How long are you staying in the island?"

"Haven't the faintest notion!"

"What are your intended movements after leaving here?"

"Haven't got any!"

"Have you no business or private ties in any particular place?"

"Not a sign of a tie!"

"You rather puzzle me. What are your

wishes—I mean, what part of the game are you playing; or, would you rather say nothing of yourself?”

“Well, you see, I am tired of the game all round, and I’m now—well, I suppose I’m playing for a finish. I spent a good bit of my time in working for a certain end—that was in the colonies. Then I came home, and the end wasn’t there, that’s all! Now I’m sick of the game, and—perhaps that’s why I didn’t mind your friends’ knives.”

Menuel smoked for some time in silence, and now and again he glanced at the Englishman, who lay on a rug near the window, and was about as fine a looking man as Menuel had ever seen.

“Yet there must be some hands in the game you have never played,” said the tall man thoughtfully.

“A good many, but you see I’m full of the game itself!” Wray smiled, and his smile was rather sad.

“Look here, my friend,” said Menuel, rising to his feet, and tossing away the end of his cigarette. “Will you play a hand with me before you throw your cards down? A man

can always leave the table when he likes, but he can't come back if he wants to ever so."

Then, without waiting for a reply, the tall man began to talk; moving quickly about the room as he spoke, and saying many things that need not be put down here.

"'Isté! One's last throw is lucky sometimes. I am a trader, a man that sells anything that people will buy for more than I need pay for it. I am tired of the little cutting and scraping for a living with the crowd up yonder." Perhaps Menuel's nod included Europe, or it might only have meant England. "I have looked for a place where buyers should be many and sellers few. And now I am going there. I'm going where thousands of niggers work and sell their products for tobacco and buttons and Hamburg gin and rags from Manchester. They buy, you may say, from one big family, who rules their coast and grows very rich on their produce. I know it, and I'm going there to do a little bit of the buying and selling. There is plenty of room in that part of Africa, and the risk is not mine, because I go to represent merchants in London. I take their goods with me. They will send me more, and I shall sell for them

and buy for them, and—for myself, a little, you understand! Now I have very little capital, and I am only one man. One man may be forced on his knees, you see, and if knives are used—But you follow me! Suppose I have a little more capital, and the help of a man who, like me, is making a last throw—who is not afraid; and—'Isté, there is fortune that way! What do you say, my friend? Have you any capital?"

Wray was sitting up now, with one hand on the ledge of the window. "I've something between three and four hundred," he said.

Menuel's eyes flashed in the light of his glowing cigarette. "And I have two hundred," he said; "and all my stock of guns and gin and coloured cloths, and a free hand to establish agencies. See here, my friend, I can't make a fuss about what I feel, but I start in your debt for to-night's affair, and all I can say is, I shan't forget it. Let us two play a final hand together, and fight the thing out to a finish. Will you do it?"

"By the Lord, Menuel, I will; and here's my hand on it!"

Then the two men went to sleep, just as the sky was turning slaty-blue, like the wine in the little cabin below the bridge.

CHAPTER II

PLAYING AGAINST ODDS

MENUEL, the trader, found very little of that languid indifference which he had first noticed in his new friend, in the methods of that gentleman when his mind was fixed upon a course of action.

Richard Wray was too young a man, and too clean run, to be soured right through by the series of disappointments which the last year or so of his life had brought him.

But, he was alone in the world ; he felt his loneliness ; and, as he said, he was "tired of the game itself."

The vivacity and energy of the trader Manuel, and the spice of risk and adventure in his schemes, together formed exactly the kind of tonic Wray stood most in need of. And the man who, a few days after the night in the Hotel de Quatro Naciones, stood by Manuel's side on the poop of a trading steamer bound down the coast of the

Dark Continent, was even more full of fight than he had been under the stimulating influence of the black and yellow tangle in which they originally found each other.

“So it’s fixed that we make our first stand at Carra Adoa, since this packet doesn’t touch Bathurst. And I’m not sure but what Carra’s the best start, anyhow. We can always break ground, either together or separately, when once we’re established.”

So spoke the man of Maltese extraction. And Wray nodded, for Carra Adoa or Fernando Po were all one to him, “the Coast” being a part of the world he had neither visited nor heard much of.

“How is it you know so much of these places,” he asked, “since you have never been to the Coast before?”

“Ah, my friend, you have heard me talk of Australia, yet I have never seen that beautiful country. Then in this case, I have studied the locale, of course, and have done business with people who know the Coast so well as to have made very decent incomes out of it for many years. Also I know the nig—coloured gentleman—I beg pardon—and I know Africa.”

Manuel did more than inspire confidence. He created it, and suckled it into maturity, by never appearing at a loss, unless his hand were so very strong as to make doubt impossible. He never said "I think," unless the person to whom he spoke knew that he knew.

"And how shall we commence operations in Carra Adoa?" asked Wray.

"That's all cut and dried to our hands," replied the tall man. "I have two introductions to wealthy natives; and I'm bringing with me goods actually ordered by one of the biggest chiefs in that part of the Coast. That ought to start us fairly well, eh?"

So Wray told himself that he and his partner between them held strong cards, and stood well to sweep the board on their last throw.

A week passed quickly, and then the little steamer dropped anchor one morning opposite the coal wharf at Carra Adoa, just as the sun was rising over the hills behind the town.

"Good morning, Mistah Manuel, sah! Nevah speck' see yew when I come 'board 'is morning. Yew goin' right on to Cape Coas', sah?"

It was a very intensely coloured gentleman who spoke, and the brilliant pattern of the

pyjama trousers he wore was admirably set off by the sheen of his new black coat.

Menuel and Wray were leaning over the ship's rail together, and the darkey had just clambered up the gangway.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Johnson!" said Menuel. "No, I'm coming ashore to stay right here in this beautiful town of yours."

"Gentleman seems to know you," said Wray.

"Yes," replied the tall man, smiling blandly; "I met him buying goods in London last year."

A little later on Menuel and Wray chartered a dinghy, and started for the shore, having arranged to send a small lighter out for their goods before the ship sailed that evening.

On arriving at the crazy old landing-stage in front of the English church, the two were taken in hand by a preternaturally solemn boy, who gave his name as "Darkey's delight-cum-'appy-day," and was anxious to welcome the strangers to Africa by acting as their guide and escort.

"No, no, sonny; we no want guide!" Then Menuel paused a moment. "Well, I don't know," he muttered. "Yes, all right, Darkey."

Go ahead. Take us to Mister Adul's! You sabe Mister Adul, eh?"

"'Ess, sah! Me sabe ebley place on de Coast. Me best boy on de Coast. 'Dese udder nigger boys 'dey no sabe not at all—foolish like evleything."

And with a scornful wave of his little black hand, Darkey designated a group of laughing urchins sprawling on the water-washed steps of the landing; who, whilst all too lazy to interfere with his capture of the white men, yet shouted out their claim to superiority as guides, and expressed good-humoured pity for the benighted foreigners.

"Dat boy he be no good, sah! Me—Joolyer Cæsar—de bes' boy! No, no! No beleeve 'im, sah. 'E be fool boy! no get no sense. Me—Ab'ram Link'en—de bes' boy! Yah! Ho, o—oh!" and they rolled over each other in pursuit of a banana, each boy choking almost with animal happiness.

The two traders had several interviews that morning with different business-men of colour and weight in the town; and the white man who represented the big firm there, seemed disposed to be very friendly.

"Were you on the Coast some five or six years ago, Mr. Manuel?" he asked, as the two were leaving him.

"No, this is my first glimpse of it," replied Manuel.

"Ah, I merely asked because I heard something this morning of the arrival of a trader who was in Cape Coast a few years back, and whom several of the natives wanted to see. I've only been here a year myself."

"No, I'm quite a raw beginner," said Manuel modestly; "but hope to be something more by-and-by." And so they parted; and the white representative of the large firm stood in the doorway of his store, watching his visitors walk slowly down the white, uneven road, their big umbrellas resting on their shoulders.

"H'mp," he muttered, turning into his shop to escape the dazzling sunlight, "I'm inclined to think something must be done for you gentlemen at once. Koora!" He turned to a native boy at the counter. "Run up to the court, and ask if Mr. Johnson got what he wanted. Sabe—quick now!"

Manuel and Wray walked slowly to the landing-stage in front of the church.

Every one had been civil ; and the little naked children, who rolled about in the dust all day, had been effusive. Every one, too, had said that no business was being done, and that the Coast was not what it used to be. "No all same now ! 'E be dibb'lunt like 'a dunno' what !"

And in all the two men had heard there had been, so it seemed, an undercurrent ring of "Well, stop here if you like, and we are glad to see you, of course ; but——" And what was left unsaid told more than what was said, of the outlook for a new trader.

Both men were fagged after their first morning in the steamy African air, and Wray was not sorry when his partner said, "Well, suppose you go off to the ship and get our things together, and I'll follow later on with the lighter."

Ten minutes after Wray had clambered over the rail of the little steamer, thinking, as he did so, how clean and cool her poop-deck looked as a contrast to the clamminess of the shore ; he heard a Krooman shouting, "Wray, Wray ! Letter foh' Wray !" The "Mister" of civilisation is a thing persistently ignored by the democratic Krooman of the Coast.

The letter was a card, and on it was written,

shakily and in pencil, "Johnson has served me with a writ. Am under arrest. Let the baggage rip and come at once.—J. A. MENUËL."

"Oh! Well, that's lively," muttered Wray, who was then superintending the hauling up on deck of the firm's stock-in-trade.

There was only one thing to be done, however. Snatching up his umbrella from where it lay on a deck chair, Wray hurried down the gangway into a boat which lay alongside.

"Damned if I liked the look of that nigger in the pyjamas, when he came aboard this morning," muttered the Englishman, as he remembered that he had already met the Johnson referred to on Menuel's card. "However, perhaps it's only a question of a forty-shilling fine for having punched some one's woolly head. Cheap at double the money, b'gad; but a bad beginning all the same. What the dickens are you grinning at, you figure-head of sin?"

Wray's boatman, though sparsely clothed, was a gentleman who possessed three seats in the little Methodist Chapel of the town. And he was not accustomed to such off-hand familiarity as this.

"Sah," he ejaculated, spluttering with wrath, "me nebber grin, sah! What yew mean? Yew take me foh' nigger, sah?"

"No, no! Nigger? Lord, no! Only pull, and get me ashore. I was—er—talking to some one else."

Arrived at the landing-stage, Wray found that his friend had been taken up to the court-house.

Abraham Lincoln, a broad-minded boy, who bore no malice over not having been engaged in the morning, offered to escort the white man to the court. So these two toiled up the stony main-street together, to the ramshackle weather-board establishment where law was dispensed.

From a grizzled and decrepit official who lived on the verandah of this building, Wray learned that, before a judge then sitting in chambers, Johnson, the native merchant, was pleading under summary jurisdiction for the detaining of Manuel's person, pending the arrival of certain goods from England.

With characteristic disregard of ceremony, Wray walked carelessly into the musty court-room, and saw Manuel standing before a native

judge, whilst Johnson, from the solicitor's table, ranted and raved in support of his plea.

Wray was promptly ordered out of the room, with an indignant "Leave the court, sah!" from the bench, and told that he must wait on the verandah. There he found an American who had spent some months in the town, and was to leave it that day in the steamer by which Wray and Manuel had arrived.

"My friend," said the Yankee, "I know this place all ends up, and I've got no manner of use for it. Take a fool's advice and clear right out before your heart breaks. Digby Farn and Son run this entire Coast, and you can't get behind them. You needn't say I mentioned it, but this prosecution ain't Johnson's. Not much, it isn't. The writ was in Digby Farn's store an hour ago, and you'll have to compromise somehow. So-long. I'm off aboard the lugger, and if you're wise you'll come along."

CHAPTER III

SHARP PLAY

So the Yankee swaggered out into the sunlight, and Wray sat down under the jalousies of the court-room to smoke, and listen. He felt somewhat left alone, and was glad when a gorgeous scarlet and yellow lizard waddled lazily across the verandah, and lay staring at the toe of his buckskin boot.

Through the windows over his head came the sound of angry voices, speaking for the most part in pidgeon English. Round about him in all directions half-naked negroes lay, sleeping and snoring in the shade of the verandah. And outside, the very earth seemed to be throbbing faintly in the glaring heat of the afternoon.

"This sort of fooling won't pay, my friend. Something's got to be done!" Wray rose to his feet as he said this, and moved towards the door of the court-room.

At that moment the door swung open, and a

bare-footed, knickerbockered policeman shouted, "Mistah Wray!"

"That's me," said the Englishman. And in another minute he was standing in the steamy little court, and giving evidence on his partner's behalf.

Menuel was described as a resident of Cape Coast Castle, who was carrying on business in that town. Wray swore that he was not an African resident, but a new arrival with no established business.

The ground of the plea was, that if Menuel were allowed to remain at large he might leave the port, and thus prejudice an action then pending against him.

As a matter of fact, Johnson had no action pending, whatever his intentions in that direction might be. For the rest, there was a rambling statement about certain goods for which a representative of Menuel's had been paid, and which had never been sent from England.

"The brute's trying to make me personally responsible for some difficulty he's had, or says he's had, with Blakely, of London, some of whose samples we are carrying!"

This Menuel managed to whisper to Wray,

whilst Johnson, at the solicitor's table, was raving his loudest.

Then, in a momentary pause, Manuel said, "Your honour, Mr. Wray here can testify that Mr. Johnson chatted over business with me this morning on friendly terms."

The native judge raised his head sharply from his hands, for he had been dozing.

"What do you mean, sah? Mistah Wray! Where is Mistah Wray? What have you to say, sah?"

A sergeant, who, by virtue of his office, wore trousers, prodded Wray with his baton, and grinned genially as he shouted, "Hole yoh 'ed up, witneess, an' 'dress yoh remark to 'is Honah on de Bench!"

Wray's brown right hand clenched itself involuntarily. And then, with a bland smile, he did as he was bid.

Afterwards he drifted gradually from the rickety, unpainted witness-box to the solicitor's table, at which Johnson stood, ranting against time, and waiting hopefully for some sign of the departure of the steamer, aboard which was the stock-in-trade of Manuel and his partner.

The afternoon wore on, and the judge,

waking suddenly from another doze, said hurriedly: "Your case is a weak one, Mistah Johnson—er——"

"But y' 'onah," shouted Johnson, whilst great drops of perspiration fell from his shining face on to the table before him. And then he branched off into another long story; and Wray, leaning over to his partner, whispered—

"Look here, old man, the steamer will be going directly, with all our stuff aboard. Let me see if I can work the case!"

"Go ahead for all you're worth," replied Menuel.

So, taking advantage of the first pause that came, Wray began to address the bench, in orthodox barrister fashion. Court etiquette was evidently not rigid in that part of the world. And, as Johnson conducted his own case, the Englishman could see no reason why he should not act for his friend; particularly as his complete ignorance of the point at issue placed him upon the same plane apparently, as that occupied by every one else in the court.

Wray was just angry enough to act his part well; and, from where he stood, facing

the perspiring Johnson, he lashed out into eloquence which surprised himself almost as much as it did Menuel, and the court.

"Go it, old chap! Buck in and win; but cut it as short as you can," whispered his partner.

But Wray had already floored the darkey ignominiously on every point raised. And the judge was beginning to doze again.

Suddenly, and at the height of Wray's most telling onslaught, the long, piercing note of a ship's steam-whistle came cutting through the outside stillness of the tropical afternoon.

Wray looked imploringly at the drowsy judge. Menuel thought of his stock aboard the steamer, and turned pale. Johnson, the native merchant, grinned horribly, and those of the court officials who had been kept awake by Wray's eloquence, winked at each other and chuckled. Johnson seized the opportunity to break out with a fresh argument, and just as the second whistle blew, he began: "Y' 'onah, 'dis man 'e be foolish like——"

Wray bit his lips, and looked all the fighting man, as he leaned over towards Menuel. "Gad, Menuel," he murmured, "she'll be out of the harbour in a few minutes, and we shall

be stranded in this ungodly hole without a rag to our backs!"

Menuel shrugged his big shoulders in despair. "What can we do?" he said.

Wray glanced quickly round the court. "Look here," said he, whispering between tightly clenched teeth, and pointing the while at some papers, as though speaking of the case, "I'm going to bowl Johnson over, if I die for it; and then fix the policeman as I clear through that window. You settle the bobby on your right, and jump for the door. We can get down to a boat before they wake up, man! Watch now!"

Menuel thought of the black and yellow tangle in Las Palmas, and was satisfied.

Johnson went down over his chair, with his teeth sunk deep in his tongue; and Wray seemed almost to carry his policeman with him, as he bounded through the low open window. Menuel tripped his man, who fell awkwardly, with a grunt of pain. One minute afterwards the two white men were racing down the rocky main-street like a pair of wallabies.

Behind them the two could hear a confused din of shouting and the slamming of many

doors, and before them, away out in the sparkling blue water of the harbour, they could see the little vessel they had arrived in, getting up steam.

"If there's a boat at the steps," panted Manuel.

"We're safe as houses," suggested the other man, staggering slightly as he cleared a great hollow in the road.

"Yes. And if not? 'Isté!"

Wray chuckled as he ran. "If not, I'll have to ask for an adjournment, be Gad!"

CHAPTER IV

REVOKING

It was fortunate for Menuel and his partner that old Peter Taiwo and his son Adao, had returned early from the fishing-ground that day. Also, it was as well for the white men that father and son had proceeded direct to Maria Amodus's gin-hut, after mooring their little sailing-boat to the landing-steps; instead of, as their custom was, making their boat snug for the night under the coal wharf.

The exit of Wray and Menuel from the court-house had been so distinctly an unrehearsed effect, and the proceedings of that establishment were usually of so somnolent a character, that some little time had elapsed before the full importance of the situation was realised. Then, judge, officials, and prosecutor, had all more or less tumbled over one another in their efforts to vacate the court.

When at last Johnson, with his mouth full

of loose teeth and strange oaths, did reach the road, accompanied by three spluttering policemen, and the now thoroughly-awakened judge; he was just able to catch a glimpse of Menuel's white helmet, and of Wray's green-lined umbrella, as the two fugitives disappeared over the edge of the landing-steps. Then the judge placed on record a judicial oath of considerable forcibility; and the whole court started off at the double down the main street of the town. The judge, however, was a man of corpulent tendencies, and was obliged to slow down to walking pace when he reached the steep part of the hill.

The three policemen felt a delicacy about distancing the Bench. And so it happened that Johnson, who was fairly nimble on his feet, reached the landing-stairs alone. In his excitement he did not look behind to see if his forces were with him, but scrambled at once down the slippery steps to where Peter Taiwo's boat lay.

"Come back, sah, yew runaway—theef—murd'rer," spluttered Johnson; seeing that at that moment Wray was engaged in hoisting the boat's sail, whilst his partner loosened her moorings.

“Keep out of the boat, Mr. Johnson! Keep out of the boat, sir; and simmer down, will you!” said Wray, as he hauled the sheet of the little mainsail aft.

But Johnson was full of wrath and soreness, and, feeling that he had a court of law at his back, he sprang boldly into the boat, just as Menuel pushed off from the steps, and stood then astride a thwart glaring at his enemies.

A light but steadily increasing breeze was coming down from the hills behind the town; and when the learned judge, with his escort of three policemen and a nondescript following, arrived at the water's edge, the boat seized by the white men was bowling merrily along some couple of hundred yards from the shore.

From the spluttering stage Johnson passed quickly to abuse; and from that in a wonderfully short time to a silence only disturbed by words of pleading. Wray smiled calmly through all these phases, and Menuel spoke cheerfully of economising his revolver cartridges, and finishing Johnson with a pocket-knife.

“No, sah, foh de Lor' a mussy's sake, you no murder, sah! Me no can 'ellip'dis trubbil to-day. 'E be Digby Farn trubbil; me no want 'um.”

"Ah, well, you played your part very fairly well, Mr. Johnson, and I'm sure you won't mind dying for Digby Farn!"

Wray rose from his seat at the tiller. "By God, Menuel," he said, gazing out at the little steamer. "They're under weigh and leaving us! Wave something, and hail them, will you?"

"Give us something! Here, you darkey, give me that white shirt of yours! Quick, now. 'Isté! There's four rowing-boats pulling off from the shore. Lucky this was the only thing with a sail on it!"

Then, when Mr. Johnson had wriggled out of his well-starched upper garment, Menuel stood in the bow of the little cutter, and waved his emblem of civilisation aloft, whilst hailing the steamer at the top of his voice.

Fortunately for the runaways, the Yankee who had spoken to Wray that afternoon had told the whole story on the little steamer's poop; and now, when Menuel's signal was caught sight of, engines were stopped, and the vessel lay almost motionless inside the mouth of the harbour.

Whilst the rowing-boats in pursuit were still far behind under the shadow of the hills, old

Peter Taiwo's cutter shot alongside the outgoing steamer, and Manuel let her mainsail down with a run.

"Since your shirt came in handy, Mr. Johnson, we will say no more about the knife," said Wray, as he caught and made fast a rope's end thrown from the steamer. "But mind, let's have no more of your little tin deputy devildom for Digby Farn. And now you may go for a sail round the harbour, or you can take this boat back at once, with our thanks for the use of it. Good day to you, Mr. Johnson!"

And Wray climbed up the steamer's side.

"My compliments to Digby Farn," said Manuel, as he followed his friend; "and my lawyers in London will be glad to hear from them. Adio,—and be damned to you, Mr. Johnson!"

A few minutes afterwards the partners stood together on the steamer's poop, watching Peter Taiwo's boat, gradually becoming a mere speck on the horizon astern.

"Business hasn't been extra brisk at our first stopping-place, has it?" said Wray. "I'm afraid we must be content to do without an agency there."

Menuel looked a little gloomy.

"Yes; it's that cursed Digby Farn. You see they've run the show down here so long that they can do pretty much as they like. But if they've got rid of us here, by Heaven they shan't move us in the next place!"

"Glad to see you took my advice and left that forsaken hole of a town," said the Yankee to whom Wray had spoken at the court-house, as he took his stand near the partners.

"Ye—es, we left in rather a hurry," began Wray, chuckling to himself as he recalled the picture of Mr. Johnson's collapse on the court-house floor.

Menuel flashed a warning look from his bright, dark eyes, and Wray shrugged his shoulders and explained himself by saying, "We were undecided up to the last moment as to whether it would be worth while to stay or not."

The American looked sharply at Wray and then at Menuel.

"Yep," he drawled. "Jes' so!" And then he turned and walked away towards the saloon companion.

"It's a mistake to take people into your confidence on the Coast," said Menuel to his

partner. And Wray having expressed indifference by a movement of his eyebrows, the two began to talk of other things.

Said Menuel: "Since Carra Adoa is barred for a time, I think our best line will be to take our things ashore at Naddah, and make a start there. What do you think?"

"It's all new country to me," said Wray. "But what's the chances of Digby Farn having us convicted of forgery or infanticide at Naddah? It would be as well to tackle a place where the police are fairly few and inferior, if possible."

"'Isté! Is all your life a joke, my friend?"

"No, *sir*," laughed Wray. "But I don't want it to be all a lawsuit. I'd sooner fight these hospitable friends some other way."

"Well, there's no court-house at Naddah, anyhow, and Digby Farn's store's in charge of a darkey," said Menuel. "So we ought to rub along all right there. I believe there are only three white men in the place; a doctor, a customs man, and a German missionary, who runs a factory."

"A dealer in souls, and kernels, palm-oil, and the Gospel, eh?"

"That's about it, and he makes a very good thing out of it, as they mostly do on the Coast. Anyhow, we'll leave the ship at Naddah, and I fancy we shall make a good start there. It's just at the mouth of the Naddah river, you know, which is an offshoot of Benin river; and there's a lot of palm-oil and mahogany comes down that river. It's far too shallow for a steamer, and they say no white men have ever been more than five or six miles inland by it. They can't get inland on foot because of the mangrove swamps. And all down the Coast it's just the same; the white men live on the beach, and never get into a canoe unless it's to go off to a ship."

On the seventh night after leaving Carra Adoa, the little steamer dropped anchor outside the breakers of Naddah, and Manuel and his partner put everything in readiness for going ashore next day.

"Have you known your tall friend long?" said the Yankee to Wray, when they met on deck next morning.

"No; I met him for the first time in Las Palmas last month," replied Wray.

"H'm. Has he been on the Coast before?"

"No; but he knows a good deal about it through his business with London traders, and so on."

"Yep! He seems to know it very well. Maltese, isn't he—Mr. Menuel?"

"No, I believe he's English; but really, I couldn't swear to it. Why?"

"Oh, nothing! But—look here, don't think me rude, Mr. Wray. I've knocked about this Coast a goodish bit, and in some other places, too, farther off from hell. I may be a fool, but I don't mean any sort of harm; and—don't trust your whole immortal soul to Mr. Menuel, my friend; not if you can help it, and your soul's anyways solvent."

"You're very kind to interest yourself in me," began Wray, smiling, and half bristling up. "But——"

"Jes' so; you'll thank me to mind my own affairs? Dead right for you; but I jest thought I'd mention this thing, because I had it in my blood, d'ye see. That's all. And good morning, Mr. Wray! I wish you luck, you and your pard!"

Dick Wray was nothing if not absolutely loyal in friendship; but the American's con-

fidences, however ill-advised, were so obviously well-meaning that he could not but take them in good part.

So he waved a smiling farewell to the Yankee as he clambered down the ship's side into a surf-boat containing half the firm's property.

"Good-bye, Señor Manuel!" shouted the American, as the older man took his seat in a second boat laden with the other half of the partners' stock-in-trade.

It was not a pleasant look that Manuel flashed up from under his heavy brows to the man on the steamer. "Good-bye!" he muttered. And then he added something very like his favourite "'Isté!"

CHAPTER V

A POOR DEAL

THE greater part of the coloured population of Naddah were assembled on the beach to meet the two new arrivals, when they came skimming over the creamy surf which beats eternally on the shores of West Africa.

"White members of community in large numbers graced the occasion by their absence," muttered Wray, as he looked quizzically up and down the unrelieved line of black faces.

However, in less than an hour the white population, consisting of four men—the Government representative and leader of Naddah society; a missionary, and two traders—had been called upon, and more or less fawned upon, by the would-be settlers.

The white residents were very friendly. Mr. Manuel and his partner meant to establish themselves as traders. Yes, there was certainly plenty of room on the Coast, and they, the

white residents, wished Messrs. Manuel and Wray every success; but—— And then they raised their eyebrows deprecatingly, and asked the newcomers to drink cock-tails.

The Maltese hurried operations along, as though half afraid discouragement might come before a start was made. The ramshackle premises of a deserted mission-station were purchased for a mere song, and the partners opened a store.

“Not very keen on shopping, the Naddah ladies, are they?” said Wray to his partner, after a week, in the course of which the only purchases from the store had been a bottle of hair-oil and a half-pound of tobacco. Wray had bought the tobacco, and a chief’s wife, under the impression that she was buying from one of the other stores, had negotiated for the hair-oil.

“They shop right enough,” growled Manuel.
“But, confound ’em, they won’t shop with us!”

“Yet I’m sure my manners as a salesman are all that even a chief’s wife could desire; and my method of displaying goods is really reminiscent of Regent Street.” Wray leaned back on the empty gin-case, which served him as a seat, and chuckled softly.

"Isté, you laugh, Amigo ; but it seems to me the fun's on their side. I don't know how you would like being stranded in a place like this, but we certainly can't stay here as things are going, without being stranded."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the younger man. "I expect they'll come by-and-by, when our fame has gone abroad a bit more."

"No, curse them, that's exactly what they won't do! I've visited every soul in the place, and I can see just how the land lies. They're all on the books of either Crosby or Digby Farn's man, and since we've been here, Digby Farn's nigger has let 'em know pretty clearly that if they buy so much as a hank of thread from us, they'll be all sold up before their palm-oil comes down the river, to pay for what they owe. We've been boycotted, and, by the Lord! Digby Farn's too strong to fight!"

And as week followed week, it became evident that what Manuel said was true.

Trade for the two partners was not simply poor or difficult to obtain, but impossible. They decided that a move from Naddah was absolutely necessary, but where to turn to next they could not think.

After talking the matter over with his partner one afternoon, and discussing the advisability of purchasing a big canoe with a view to trying a trip inland on the Naddah river; Wray took a boat and went off to the little steamer which that morning had anchored outside the breaker line, on its way down the coast from Carra Adoa.

"I've a message for you, partner," he said to the Maltese, on his return to the verandah of the ramshackle store, where Menuel sat.

"Message for me?" echoed Menuel. "Who in creation sends me a message?"

"Well, if it's not from a lady it's about one, so you ought to——"

"For Heaven's sake, Wray, stop joking for once. What lady do you think would send me a message?"

"My dear fellow, now you mention it, I'm hanged if I didn't forget to ask her name. It was the captain of the *Aracan* gave me the message, just as I was coming down the ship's side. He said, 'Tell your partner that some woman'—white, I think she was—'landed at Carra Adoa the same day as we left. She was looking for Mr. John Albert Menuel, and said

she'd find him if she hunted all Africa.' He said something else, just as I shoved off," continued Wray, "but he was laughing, and I couldn't catch it."

"Curse the woman! 'Isté! Shall I——"

"Why, what's up?" interrupted Wray, startled by the look of rage on his partner's face.

"Oh, nothing," said the Maltese. "I suppose it's—— Well, I expect it's a slut of a native up to some game, under Digby Farn's orders. However, that's nothing—er—Look here, Wray, old man, I've been thinking, and it's clear to me we must vamoose from this place. We can't do anything on the Coast where other white men are."

"H'mph! How about going up the river? No white men go there, do they?"

"By the Lord! you're right, partner. Is it a deal?"

"Why, yes, I'll come. I'm rather keen on these oil-rivers as they call them."

CHAPTER VI

THE ACE OF TRUMPS

“As co-commander of this—shall we say?—this vessel,—yes, that will do. As co-commander of this elegantly-appointed and commodious vessel, I shall now take a little well-earned repose, partner mine ; and, my state-room being—in the hands of the painters and decorators, I shall take it right here under this awning.”

Wray and his partner were sitting under the hoop-awning of a river canoe ; and though the sun had not long risen, and the real heat of the day had not yet come, the younger man stretched himself out on the smooth redwood bottom-boards of the canoe, with the avowed intention of sleeping.

No sooner had the two men agreed, three days before, to try their fortunes on the Naddah river than Manuel at once set about the necessary arrangements for giving up the store he had been so anxious to start. The Maltese cer-

tainly had reason on his side in the matter of wishing to leave Naddah, for there appeared no possibility of the partners making a living there. Still, Wray had been unable to help expressing surprise at the almost feverish energy displayed by Manuel in making arrangements for their departure.

"It's better to be on the move," the older man had said. "We can't do any good here, and I hate the place now, anyhow. Besides, I feel a sort of responsibility about you, Amigo. Remember, I told you I thought we should succeed on this Coast, and if only because of that, I mean to do it somehow."

So Wray had shrugged his shoulders, whilst begging his partner not to feel any responsibility in what was clearly a game of chance; and the two had joined forces in hurrying out of the township.

The building they had occupied, Digby Farn's man relieved them of, giving them in exchange a fair-sized river canoe. This craft the partners had loaded with Manchester and Birmingham goods and provisions, and then, having engaged three natives who agreed to act as crew in return for their food and a small payment if the trip

turned out well, Menuel and Wray bade good-bye to the hospitable town of Naddah. The population, black and white, had turned out to see the last of them; and as Wray said, "Considering the trying and melancholy nature of the occasion, the residents in general, and Digby Farn's man in particular, bore up remarkably well."

And now the two men, after a night spent in the completing of arrangements, were fairly under weigh on their voyage inland. Menuel's idea was to break new ground; to proceed far enough up the yellow, winding Naddah river, or its parent stream of Benin, to reach a point not touched by white men, and, having reached it, to settle long enough to barter a certain amount of shoddy for as large an amount of mahogany, palm-oil, and gold, if possible, as could be obtained. He saw clearly that the Coast itself was entirely in the hands of the few white men who occupied it. But one of his crew of three was a fluent speaker of pidgeon English, and, with the assistance of this man, Menuel saw no reason why arrangements should not be opened up with the inland chiefs for really big business.

By the time the town of Naddah was left ten or twelve miles astern, the *Ace of Trumps*, as Wray laughingly christened the firm's canoe, found very little current to contend with; and the great rustling walls of mangrove, the shadows of which met and amalgamated in mid-stream, seemed to slip past very swiftly. From early morning till within an hour of noon the three natives paddled where there was no wind, and sailed when possible. For two or three hours in the middle of the day, Moto, the English-speaking darkey, and his two subordinates, went "Foh li'li sleep, sah, 'cos dem sun 'e be burn like 'a dunno wat, sah!"

At night the *Ace of Trumps* was made fast stem and stern to a couple of trailing mangrove branches, whilst crew and captain slept in an atmosphere reeking with miasma germs. Quinine was a regular article of diet, however, and so far the partners were in perfectly good health.

Wherever a little tract of solid beach took the place of the water-nourished mangrove walls, the partners saw little native settlements of from ten to twenty huts.

"Digby Farn big boat 'e come 'dis place all time, ebly month, sah!"

This was Moto's comment, and so the white men pushed on, bent on reaching virgin soil.

On the morning of the fourth day, the elder of the two partners was roused shortly after sunrise by a hand being laid on his foot. The hand was Moto's, and Moto was very much in earnest about something. One finger was raised to his heavy lips, and his great eyes rolled as he said—

“Yew, Messah Menuel, yew wake 'um Messah Wray, an' we go 'way foh dis place one time, yew sabe? Dere come heah bimeby very bad nigger man, plenty no good, yew sabe? Yew sabe 'um Jassa country black peepil, 'e be no good, an' kill 'um yew an' Messah Wray one time. See!”

Menuel raised himself on one elbow, his keen eyes following the direction indicated by Moto's outstretched hand.

The *Ace of Trumps* was lying at the head of a long, straight reach. Fully half-a-mile away, gliding along close to the mangrove branches, Menuel was just able to distinguish the outlines of two long, and apparently well-manned canoes. Moto, whose eyes were keener, knew by the build of these craft that they came from some

settlement beyond his ken—he was thinking of certain nomadic tribes whose headquarters were within gunshot of the walls of Benin city, Ju-Ju's greatest river stronghold—and, therefore, probably savage. And his knowledge made him anxious to get round the bend in the river and out of that straight reach, before the *Ace of Trumps* was seen. Once round the bend, he hoped to find shelter.

Wray and Menuel were not long in grasping the situation; but in the hurry of unmooring and getting under weigh, the younger partner was rash enough to send the canoe flying out into the stream with one vigorous shove-off from the mangroves.

“Oh, my daddy, oh!” wailed Moto. “Now we bin done foh. Dem black men dey bin see us now, foh suah. Messah Wray, yew be foolish like 'a dunno wat!”

That Moto's surprise was correct was proved by the fact that just before the *Ace of Trumps* rounded the curve of the stream, several shouts came echoing over the water from the canoes astern, and fourscore paddles could be seen flashing in and out the yellow water at a rate which undoubtedly meant pursuit. Not a breath of

wind was stirring, and though the *Ace of Trumps* was a much lighter craft than were those astern, the race was one of eighty or ninety paddles against three properly handled, and two worked by white men all unused to their manipulation.

A very few minutes sufficed to bring the pursuers round the bend of the river, and then Wray and Manuel could hear the fierce chanting of the men at the paddles, and the rhythmical "Quish, quosh" of each forty-man-power stroke.

"Yew hoo aloo a la aloo a la lah!"

On they came, and the two white men, dropping their paddles, knelt down under the canoe's awning to see to their Winchesters and ammunition.

At that moment the *Ace of Trumps* reached the opening of a narrow creek, and the thought of dodging and finding shelter, made Manuel order Moto to turn into this little estuary.

"No, no, 'e be no good, sah!" gasped the nigger excitedly.

"Curse you, turn up there! Who asked your opinion?" And snatching a paddle, Manuel forced the canoe's bow into the little creek, motioning to the three darkeys to paddle harder, as he did so.

The *Ace of Trumps* flew through the water of the narrow, winding creek, and gradually the notes of the savage chant died away behind till they could no longer be heard.

"There, you black limb," said the Maltese to Moto, "perhaps you'll take notice without so much jaw another time."

Moto's good-humoured face was streaming with perspiration, and he only said, as he bent more easily to his work—

"Well, sah, black man 'oo sabe dis river, nevah like go up creek, 'cos no sabe where 'um lead—huh!"

Almost half-an-hour passed, and the two partners were congratulating themselves on their lucky escape, when suddenly the very air seemed to quiver in response to a yell which appeared to rise up from the sides of their canoe. At that moment the *Ace of Trumps* shot round a sharp turn in the creek, right between two long war-canoes, and into the river itself.

They had followed the course of a creek which simply ran round a long island into the river again. And before the echoes of that triumphant yell had died away, the *Ace of Trumps* was almost swamped by the sudden force with which

she was closed in upon and boarded by the occupants of the two long canoes. Not a shot was fired by the white men, who were pinioned in the bottom of their boat with hardly a struggle, so complete was the surprise of this fierce attack.

The enemy, knowing the course of the little creek, had simply lain in wait on either side of the narrow passage through which they knew the quarry must pass. And though Wray threw one man overboard, and Manuel almost throttled another, sheer weight of odds made further resistance impossible.

The whole thing was so incredibly sudden and surprising to the white men, that both were bound securely to the side-planks of their own canoe before a word escaped the lips of either. Then Manuel swore hoarsely, and between his clenched teeth; and Wray nodded breathless acquiescence in each syllable of his partner's picturesque string of oaths.

The captors were jubilant, but showed no desire to investigate the cargo of the *Ace of Trumps* till other matters had been attended to. The old men amongst them were sent to man one of the big canoes, whilst the other

having been taken in tow, the white man's craft was made fast to it, and the three were soon gliding up-stream. Then the young men amongst the attacking party distributed themselves about the second canoe, and their chief, with a few others, took seats in the *Ace of Trumps*, and proceeded to cross-examine Moto.

Hours passed, and the white men, absolutely ignored by their captors, suffered keenly in the midday heat by reason of the cramped position into which they had been forced. Then came a sudden change in the position of affairs.

Turning a bend in the stream brought the old men in the leading canoe suddenly into view of four big, fully manned river-boats, heading towards them. The prolonged shout which warned the chief and others who were in the *Ace of Trumps*, was answered by jeering howls from the approaching craft. That shout meant rapine even to the inexperienced ears of the white men; and as the two canoes of their pursuers had been to them, so the four huge war-boats now approaching were to their captors.

An idea came to Wray, and he shouted to Moto—

“Hi, you, Moto! Tell these black beggars

that we'll save 'em, and give them other fellows bom-bom, s'pose they let us loose."

Wray had learned the only kind of English intelligible to Coast natives of Moto's type. The idea which he explained in this way was simple and good. He knew that he and his partners could keep off half a dozen canoes with the aid of their Winchesters, a method he would have adopted when the *Ace of Trumps* was pursued, but for Manuel having insisted on the line which is said to lead to ability to fight on another day.

The captors of the white men saw that they had nothing to lose by giving their prisoners a chance, and so in a few moments the vine cords which bound Manuel and his partner were cut, and the firm presented arms from under the awning of their own canoe.

The effect of their first volley was startling. The attacking party had relied entirely on their clubs and other weapons of a very rude description; believing, of course, that they would have to face nothing else. The killing with an unseen missile of four of their number, at a distance of several hundred yards, demoralised the shouting savages utterly; and when eight

men in their leading boat had shared the same fate, the heads of the four great canoes were turned, and the retreat became far more furious than the approach had been.

Then Wray and Menuel laid down their arms, and the chief of their captors bowed his head before the partners.

"Ho, daddy, oh!" ejaculated Moto, speaking now in his capacity as interpreter. "Dis cheefe 'e say yew be bes' men in all de world. He say yew can be all same king in his country—yew can have so much what you like—yoh fa'ders dey be kings. Will yew go foh dis cheef's country? Ho, daddy, oh! 'E——'e thank yew like 'a dunno wat."

The partners smiled, as words failed Moto to express the chief's gratitude; and then they looked at each other. Wray nodded, and Menuel said—

"All right, Moto, you say dis cheef 'e be very fine fellow, an' we'll come with him for his country side, wherever the dickens that may be——'Isté! but it's hot, and I'm as dry as—a Bombay duck."

CHAPTER VII

BLUFF

"Now, I wonder where in the world we're going, and what we shall do when we get there. What was your idea in being so ready to accompany these warlike but simple-minded gentlemen, Menuel? Have you a notion, by means of your own blameless example, to establish a higher moral——"

"Higher fiddlesticks!" interrupted Menuel. "My idea is that the people hail from just the kind of settlement we want to be in touch with. They are so chock-a-block full of gratitude to us for saving their lives and property—not knowing that we only wanted to save our own—and they look upon our Winchesters as something so very choice in the supernatural line, that I'm inclined to think we need not look much farther for a means of making our pile."

Wray and Menuel were comfortably stretched

at full length under the awning of their canoe, which was being towed up-stream by one of the boats belonging to their captors of the previous day. The chief, whose name Moto had ascertained to be Adaio, was squatting on his haunches in the sunlight beyond the awning, and gazing with reverential deference at the feet of the recumbent white men, by whose side lay their trusty Winchesters. Moto said the party were men of a Jassa country tribe, and came from a settlement called Jindra, on the banks of a Benin tributary.

Wray smiled lazily at his partner's last remark. "Yes," he said, "they are grateful, bewilderingly grateful; but I don't know that their gratitude is exactly a marketable commodity to us, is it?"

"Why, certainly," replied the older man. "Or at least you bet we can make it so. Look here. This Jassa country is rich—richer, far, than any of our friends on the Coast are aware—in three things: mahogany, palm-oil, and gold. In Jassa country these are the three great institutions, and the greatest of 'em is gold—sabe?"

"I begin to get a glimmering; but even such gratitude as this has its limits, and you don't

expect these children of the soil, or the water, to hand the riches of their country over to us, do you ?”

“Amigo, you don't appear to realise the situation.” Manuel sat up and began to roll a cigarette. “Their palm-oil and mahogany these people may have sold a little of. They can sell the lot as far as I'm concerned. Their gold they have never tried to sell—I'm certain of it—and we might as well be the receivers as any one else. It's no good to them ; and anyhow, if there's any question of right we can take it out of the soil ourselves. That there is alluvial gold, and a lot of it, I'm positive.”

“Ah, then, it looks as though this canoe of ours might justify her name after all. Nuggets are certainly trumps, and I'm glad to have a hand in the game.”

Manuel nodded, as the other's laziness caused him to cease speaking.

“Yes,” said Manuel, “and you take my word they will get any amount of gold for us. We can pay them in stores. We can send to the Coast for fresh supplies if we want to, and we'll get old Adam, or Adaio, or whatever his name is, to establish us as traders.”

"Or emperors," suggested Wray, with half-closed eyes. "Look at the infatuated old sweep now, staring at us as though we were heaven-born deputies of Ju-Ju."

Ju-Ju is the god of the West African native, and a deity to whom endless sacrifices are made. Had they been indeed kings, or Ju-Ju men, as the native priests are called, the partners could not have been better or more deferentially treated than they were for the next two days by the men who, on the occasion of their first meeting, had bound them with little enough of ceremony, to the bottom-boards of their own canoe.

During these two days the partners lay gazing about them at scenery of strange and fascinating beauty. At one time they threaded their way through narrow reaches where no sound was heard save the uncanny rustling of the water-nourished mangroves—a mystical music, which served to heighten and intensify a silence apparently far-reaching and all-pervading. Occasionally they saw, resting on the butt of a tree, the blunt, cruel-looking head of an alligator; dozing but watchful, restful but always eager for prey. Up narrow openings where no trees grew, they looked into the dark and mysterious

interior, where lay, soaking in green slime, the rotting vegetable matter of a thousand tropical decades.

Then, a sudden bend in the stream, and the canoes would shoot out into another world—a world of brilliancy, life, and sound, after a phase of shadowy decay and silent death.

Here the solid walls of plume-like mangrove gave place to comparatively open, scrub-covered swamp, where all was vivid green, save when splashes of brilliant crimson indicated the spots where the cactus spread its prickly arms, as though the better to display its flaming blossoms. Through the dancing heat-waves above, flocks of grey parrots wheeled, screaming as they flew; troops of jabbering monkeys swung in strings about the trees; and far away in the hazy distance on either side, a dark blue line showed where solid soil began, and the heavier vegetation of the jungle proper stood out against the horizon.

But, as Manuel put it, the firm had "a bigger game on hand than the admiration of oil-river scenery, though it's not bad to pass time till we get to the township they're to give us the freedom of."

CHAPTER VIII

PLAYING THE KING

EARLY in the latter half of the third day after "The Battle of Bunkum"—so Wray referred to the encounter which had made them honoured guests, who had been prisoners—chief Adaio announced through Moto, the interpreter, that the town of Jindra would be reached before the cool of the day began. At Menuel's suggestion, the partners arrayed themselves carefully in the most striking of their coloured flannels, donned brilliant sashes, and prepared to be as impressive as possible.

"My only regret," said Wray, as he placed his green umbrella and his Winchester by his side, "is that I sold my dress suit to that Digby Farn man. As a stage effect, and worn under this palm-leaf hat, it would have been superb."

Half-an-hour afterwards a signal was given by the head man in each canoe, and a chant, similar to that which had celebrated the pur-

suit of the *Ace of Trumps*, was struck up by the whole party. At intervals, chief Adaio blew a terrific and ear-piercing blast on a curiously carved horn; and all the while the monotonous "Aloo, aloo, la, ala, la, a lah" of the men at the paddles, went booming over the sunlit water, disturbing sleeping alligators, and causing the very air to quiver as in protest.

Presently the white men heard in the distance the sound of some droning kind of music, and occasionally the long-drawn note of a horn like Adaio's.

Then, as the three canoes swept in single file round a turn of the creek, the destination of the party came into full view.

Crowding together on the smooth, red soil of a little water-washed inlet, the partners could see standing a gathering consisting of perhaps a couple of hundred men, women, and children. Before them all stood one man of immense stature, his right hand resting on a long staff, and his left holding a crooked horn.

"Dem man 'e be king foh Jindra side," whispered Moto confidentially to Wray; "an' dem udder black feller in white country cloth, dey bin Ju-Ju men—stan' behind king. All dem

udders bin Jindra peepil—black fellers, no sabe English same's me."

Lower and lower the heads of the canoe-men were bent over their paddles ; louder and louder waxed the chanting ; and faster every instant flew the canoes, till streams of perspiration trickled down the back of every man, and the water round about was churned into yellow foam. A final howl of frenzied triumph ; a last furious stroke of the paddles, and, the tow-lines having been cast adrift, the three canoes shot forward side by side on to the red line of sand, at the feet of the king.

"Now, then," whispered Manuel significantly. And, raising his green umbrella with one hand, the younger man tucked his rifle under the other arm, and nodded as he rose to his feet by Manuel's side.

There they stood, whilst chief Adaio, emphasising every second word by a gesture of some kind, told the story of their miraculous bravery, to the king and the Ju-Ju men.

"Aha," muttered Moto to the partners. "Ju-Ju men no like you very much, 'cos dey b'leeve yew make 'um look foolish, yew sabe ? King 'e like yew plenty all same Adaio, 'cos 'e b'leeve

yew gie black fellers in 'nuther places bom-bom foh him."

"He's dead right there, Moto," said Menuel. "You can tell him we'd fight for him like Britons, if he's only fairly kingly with his gold dust."

Church rules State in West Africa, as in a few other places, and the chosen servants of Ju-Ju are absolute in their authority. But they are also diplomatic, and always avoid clashing with anything so general and popular as the fighting instinct. So the balance turned in favour of the white men, though for a moment there was as much chance of their being sacrificed to Ju-Ju as burnt-offerings as there was of favours being showered upon them.

That moment passed, and the firm's star began forthwith to rise.

Moto acting as interpreter, the white men were presented to the king, and, subsequently, to the Ju-Ju men; the latter receiving them with solemn dignity, whilst the king was deferential, and the crowd behind waxed furiously effusive.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, look as regal as you can, and for Heaven's sake don't let go your rifle," whispered Menuel, as with great ceremony the partners were conducted by the king and his

followers along a winding track which led from the river-bank to the settlement—a scattered collection of fifty or sixty dab and wattle huts, with an enclosed camp for the king in its centre, and an imposing-looking structure as a Ju-Ju house in the foreground.

Then began a phase in the lives of these two men more strange than any other they had experienced.

As Wray often said to his partner, it would be hard to say exactly what they were and did in Jindra, and harder still to say what they were not, and did not, there. Many little things, simple to civilisation but surpassingly curious to savagedom, they showed, and even gave, to the king and to some of his chief men. Manuel, particularly, was careful not to let any one forget that he and his partner had saved the lives of two-score Jindra warriors, and if occasion offered, could save the whole town of Jindra from attack.

On the third day of their stay in the royal camp, a mad native suffering from sunstroke rushed towards the king with the evident intention of braining that potentate with a huge club. Wray, standing at the door of his hut, broke the

man's wrist at ten paces with his Derringer, and afterwards dragged him outside the encampment, whilst the king looked on in admiring astonishment. That one act made Menuel's partner a man whose word no one in Jindra would dispute, and whose wish was law with King Karuah.

A great three-roomed hut was built for the accommodation of the two white men; and the king's first gift to Wray was a necklace of beaten-gold pendants, which made Menuel's black eyes dance and glitter with delight.

"The firm shares up on presents, of course," laughed Wray, as he deposited the necklet in a deed-box belonging to Menuel.

"Just a few months of deputy Ju-Ju business in Jindra, Amigo," said Menuel, "and our pile is made as Coast trading couldn't make it in a century."

Not long after this little episode had occurred, two canoes left Jindra, on their way to Naddah, under the command of Moto, whose services as interpreter the white men were now able to make shift without. Moto took with him a long order-list of goods to be obtained from Digby Farn, a large proportion of the firm's capital being entrusted to his keeping for this purpose.

The camp of Messrs. Menuel and Wray at Jindra was now by way of being a blend of temple, palace, and general store; and the quantity of solid, rough gold held carelessly enough by the inhabitants of the settlement, made an enlargement of the store-keeping branch of the business more than justifiable.

"I rather like the look of that little girl of yours, Amigo," said the older partner to Wray, on the evening following Moto's departure for Naddah.

"Little girl of mine—what little girl?"

"Why, the golden-skinned girl with the brown eyes—the one you had the row with the Ju-Ju men about, when they were trying to tattoo her."

"Oh!" rejoined Wray, a little stiffly. "Little Rana, you mean. Yes, she's a nice enough child."

"You're dead right, partner, and upon my word if she didn't seem so struck with you, I declare I should begin to seriously contemplate domesticity with Rana as a beginning. 'Isté! she's listening!"

And looking out of their doorway into the blue haze of the evening, the two men saw the

slight, graceful form of a young native girl, who was leaning against the rough palisade before their hut, and gazing at them intently, with great, humid, brown eyes.

Wray laughed, and cried in the vernacular, "Good-evening, Rana !"

Menuel said nothing, but his little black eyes flashed almost fiercely, as he looked first at his laughing partner, and then at the golden-skinned girl, whose form was fast disappearing. She was gliding timidly away into the shadows beyond, where her lover—Jara, the son of chief Adaio—was waiting, in a cold fury of jealousy.

CHAPTER IX

FOUL PLAY ON A HEART LEAD

WHEN a coloured daughter of Eve so far attracts a male West African as to lead him to make arrangements with a view to forsaking single blessedness, or, as the case may be, adding to the matrimonial bliss he already enjoys; he usually begins by calling in the services of a Ju-Ju man, to trace the outlines of a few warlike emblems and other chaste designs, upon the skin of his intended helpmate. Little bradawl-like instruments of sharp stone are used for the purpose; and if a love-lorn maiden survives the tattooing, her love is not unreasonably considered to have proved itself under a fairly searching test.

Now little Rana, whose soft brown eyes and warm gold skin excited Menuel's admiration, had been negotiated for, during some little time, by chief Adaio's son, Jara, a young man who at that time had only two wives.

Rana was indifferent, and carelessly happy in her indifference, until one morning she was seized and carried off to the Ju-Ju house, to undergo the tattooing process. Her screams when the lengthy operation began, attracted Dick Wray; the patron of a king, and much revered miracle-man, who carried thunder in one pocket, and death in the other.

Wray promptly interfered, and thereby came very near to causing civil war in Jindra, whilst his partner was away with King Karuah, looking for gold. However, after threatening to bring down the wrath of Ju-Ju in the shape of a tornado, if the girl were not instantly set at liberty, he secured Rana's release without the shedding of any blood, beyond that which had already been drawn from her poor little body by the Ju-Ju men.

This happened on the day before the evening of Manuel's expression of admiration for Rana; and on the following morning Wray was sent for by the king.

Karuah laughed good-humouredly as he explained to the white man that considerable friction had been caused by the latter's interference in the tattooing business.

"Of course," said the king, as, forsaking his newly acquired pidgion English, and speaking in the vernacular, he wound up his remarks on the subject, "if you want to marry Rana, then it's all very well."

"Well, but hang it, I don't want to marry her!" said Wray. "Let's go and see her father."

So the king and the white man walked together through the village, to the hut of Rana's father. There stood Rana, the sunlight glistening on her slim form, herself a sculptor's dream in living bronze. The king, Rana's father and Wray, held a long confab, Rana watching them the while from her place by the door, like a brown faun eyeing satyrs at their ease.

The end of it was that the girl, with tears welling out of her great brown eyes, knelt at the feet of Wray and the king, and begged humbly to be allowed simply to work in the white man's camp—cook for him, clean for him—anything, so that she might be there, and not marry the chief's son. Karuah nodded his royal head once or twice, and, the girl following them with head bent and eyes downcast, he and Wray walked back through the village to the camp of the white men.

So the girl was established in the household

of the king's friends. And that night Jara, the chief's son—a gentle-minded savage, who really loved Rana—beat his two wives black and blue with plantain switches.

Wray already had two or three servants, but little Rana was told off to look after his clothes, and to spread meals for the partners. This she did; her days being spent in unceasing marvel at the things the white men used which she had never even seen before, and her evenings, in sitting on the ground outside the door of the hut, watching the face of her white deliverer whilst he smoked and talked to Manuel.

Later, she would go and sit among the servants, and listen to their chatter about the doings and sayings of the wonderful men they served. There she would sit whilst they talked and talked. And she, who used to watch at least one of the white men for long hours together, would say never a word, though her great eyes glistened hungrily, and her little breast rose and fell till her hand was raised and pressed upon it, as though to give it rest.

As time went on, Wray and Manuel became as much part of Jindra as its king. And with every day their power grew.

When the younger man commented on this the Maltese added: "Yes, and what's a heap more to the point, the pile grows, too. Amigo, I feel relieved of the burden of my responsibility in bringing you to this Coast, for, by the powers, we'll leave it before long, the richest men in Africa!"

And the statement was not very unreasonable, for the partners were doing a brisk trade on lines, an example of which was the barter of a Birmingham bead necklace, or a few yards of Manchester cotton-stuff, for a handful of fine gold.

Already the firm contemplated sending a second time to Naddah, to obtain more manufactured shoddy from traders who would not have dared to have come where the two had established themselves, unless under the protection of a gunboat.

And with all this, the firm were perfectly clean-handed, and had done no harm, but rather good, in Jindra. They had introduced no fire-water, beyond a few cases of champagne with which to please Karuah; and in very many ways they had strengthened the hands of the people in the protection of their village.

Both men were feared by every one; Wray was really loved by the king, and liked by the people; Manuel was only actively disliked by two insignificant persons; and if the Ju-Ju men hated Wray, that hatred was well blended with fear and respect.

CHAPTER X

MARKING THE CARDS

RETURNING late one evening to his camp after a long confab with King Karuah, Wray heard a low cry in a girl's voice issuing from his hut, and the deep tones of Menuel's voice as the Maltese swore coarsely in English.

As he strode up in the moonlight to the open doorway, Rana, the native girl, sprang towards him, and Menuel laughed with an unpleasant scowl on his dark face.

"What's the matter here, Menuel?" asked his partner, rather angrily.

Wray had grown fond of the little brown-skinned maiden, with her docile ways, and her eagerness to pick up the pidgeon English he taught her.

"Oh! nothing—nothing," replied the older man, with a laugh. "Only this little witch of yours refusing me a kiss—that's all. One

would think she were an English parson's child—little prude."

"Well, damn it, man, why can't you leave the child alone? You've been worrying the life out of her lately, and I won't have it. Rana's under my care, and I won't have her bullied."

Wray was a man who rarely raised his voice above its ordinary pitch, and hardly ever swore. On this occasion he did both, and in some way it made Manuel recall his partner's handling of the half-caste islanders in Las Palmas, on the night of their first meeting. Himself a man of strong passions of a kind, he bitterly resented the girl's persistent rejection of his advances. And more bitterly still, he resented his partner's interference and influence over Rana.

With all this, he was far too good a diplomatist to display his feelings, and so, with a careless laugh, he said—

"My dear fellow, you needn't get excited in your championship of Rana. I can assure you she knows how to take care of herself, and—hang it, the child's nothing to me!"

By this time the girl was sobbing half

hysterically, whilst clinging to Wray's arm, and begging that she might not be sent away as punishment for "making trubbil." As Menuel strolled off to his own room, the child smothered her protector's hand with kisses, murmuring between her sobs, "Messah Wray, 'e be no good, dat man. Me no can like him becos—Oh! me no can like him—no want him foh like me, sah, please!"

"There, there, child," said Wray soothingly. "Massah Menuel no bother you no more. You no cry, Rana, but run away and dry your eyes like good girl—go 'long, now."

Then, as Rana left the room, quiet and calm again, he muttered, "Poor little woman, poor little woman! It's a damned shame, and, by the Lord Harry! she shan't be badgered."

Menuel, on the other side of the partition, smiled slightly as his quick ear caught the last words, and he muttered softly to himself, "No, poor little woman, I'm damned if she shall!"

When he made that smiling remark to himself, the Maltese was standing close to the square opening in one side of his room, which served as a window; and, though looking straight

out into the moonlight at the time, he did not know that a pair of glittering black eyes were watching his every movement, and had been watching all the evening.

Jara, the chief's son, could not help still loving Rana, and though, savage as he was, he felt no shadow of animosity towards Wray, whom he believed the girl loved; he yet hated Wray's partner with a hatred that was very fierce.

And now Jara stood like a figure of stone in the black line of shadow cast by the hut's broad eaves.

Wray was a man who did not realise the meaning of bearing malice, and when he met his partner next day, his manner towards the Maltese was perfectly cordial.

"You must excuse me, old chap," he said, holding out his hand, as he wished Manuel good morning. "You must excuse me if I was a bit touchy last night. It's my beastly temper, you know. Of course, I know you had no thought of harm to the child; but hearing her cry, and that—and—I don't know, but that sort of thing always upsets me."

"Don't say another word, old man," replied

Menuel warmly. "Gad, the fault was mine for worrying her, and I'll apologise, hanged if I won't."

"Oh, nonsense, that's all right, man. Forget all about it—you may be sure she has."

So the matter passed off, and little Rana's eyes, as she watched Wray in the evenings, grew more dog-like and devotional than ever.

A few days later Rana's father sent word down to the white men's hut that he wanted the girl for a couple of days. It appeared that the man wished to take his daughter with him to a settlement some few miles away, to see her mother, who was ill there. Wray gave his protégée a few trifles to take to her mother, and told her she might go.

Rana turned back after reaching the door on her way out of the hut, and, bending her head, touched the white man's hand lightly with her lips, as she said: "Yew no go foh sen' me 'way foh long time, Messah Wray? Yew no lib foh bin veckis" (vexed) "foh me?"

"Why, no, child," he said, stroking her soft cheeks with the fingers she had kissed. "You come back foh my house in two days, eh? Me no been veckis with you."

"But yew nevah go foh sen' me 'way foh long time?" persisted the girl.

"No, no; of course not. I want you here for look after me—sabe? Run along, now, one time, an' come back quick."

So Rana went, casting backward looks of childish devotion as she walked out of the hut.

Next morning, as the partners sat at breakfast, one of the king's messengers, whom the white men had educated in pidgeon English, came to the door of the hut with a message from Karuah.

"King 'e say dere be big bobbery on de river bimeby—big Ju-Ju palaver—sackreefice to Ju-Ju. Very fine p'laver, an' king 'e say Messah Menuel-l an' Messah Wray, better yew come along one time foh see de bobbery, 'cos all de peepil heah go for see it—no peepil stop foh Jindra."

"Aha, sacrifice to Ju-Ju, eh!" said Wray. "Let's hope it's not human. What do you say, partner, will you come and join the dance?"

"No, thanks, old man, I'm going to put in a long day at stock accounts. You go; I don't care to see it."

"Well, then, I think I will; their foolery

interests me," said Wray. And then, turning to the messenger, he added, "All right, sonny! Tell king me come now one time, sabe?"

"You'll have a lonely time, old man," said Wray, a few minutes afterwards, as he walked out of the hut. "Better change your mind, and come, won't you?"

"No, I'll stay here, thanks; I'd really rather. So-long, old man! Have a good time, and tell us all about it when you come back."

Two minutes afterwards Menuel called his own private servant to him, and said to that worthy, "Now, you limb of Satan, listen. You go quick one time to where dem Rana be, you sabe?"

The boy nodded.

"An' tell her 'spose she goin' do what Massah Menuel ask her, he come quick now an' bring her 'way one time. 'Spose she no will, den—well, she sabe. Go 'long now, quick."

And the boy scuttled out of the hut, and along the main track of the village, whilst Menuel retired to his accounts, and Dick Wray pushed his way through the dense crowd of villagers and Ju-Ju men, outside the king's great camp.

CHAPTER XI

THROWN AWAY

At certain times and seasons, the natives of the West African oil-rivers make sacrifices to Ju-Ju, with a view to inducing that deity to attend to the average rainfall, and other matters important to navigators of these highways of the swamp.

At other times, the yield of palm-oil, the supply of fish, the coming of fever, and other features of native life, form the subject of tribute and sacrifice to Ju-Ju.

All offerings on these and other occasions must be made of the giver's own free-will, and from his own property, or they are not accepted by the Ju-Ju men.

Religious faith and superstition is strong, however, and the priests are never at a loss to obtain food for sacrifice, either in the form of human life or goods and chattels.

When Wray reached the entrance of King

Karuah's main hut, he found that his was a late arrival.

There were troops of Ju-Ju men ; numbers of small outside chiefs, and other dignitaries, all of whom sat down with the king and the white man, to eat palm-oil chop from plates for which Manuel and his partner had been paid in solid gold, and to drink palm beer and dry champagne from glasses purchased in the same way.

As soon as the feast was over, King Karuah with his two brothers, who were chiefs in neighbouring villages, on his left side, and Dick Wray at his right hand, marched out together at the head of a long procession, and started towards the river. Karuah was always pleased to have the white powers with him, and especially was he glad to have Wray, for whom he entertained a most profound regard.

Behind the four leaders marched a select band of Ju-Ju men carrying long wands. And after them came a mixed gathering of chiefs, and almost the entire population of Jindra.

In a sheltered inlet on the river bank, where plantains and bananas grew in plenty, a circle of priests were standing ; and in the centre of

this ring, so Karuah explained to Wray, "de sackreefice" was being prepared.

Lying in the water near the bank, was the king's great war-canoe, a craft manned by over a hundred paddlers; and in the middle of the canoe was a raised platform for the accommodation of the Ju-Ju men who were to officiate at the sacrifice.

Whilst the party on the river bank were waiting for a start to be made, the Ju-Ju men were singing a mournful incantation, and suddenly, at a signal given by the chief priest, they all fell on their knees in prayer, thus leaving the centre of the circle exposed to view.

Wray gave one careless look over the bowed heads of the priests. And then, with a perfect roar of surprise and anger, he bounded towards the circle. In the centre of the ring a young girl was sitting, bound securely to a rough seat of bamboo. She was robed from head to foot in white cotton, and a string of crimson flowers hung loosely over her shoulders. There was a drawn pinched look on her pretty face, and round her great black eyes were traces of tears, and of weariness from want of sleep.

This, then, was the sacrifice, and, as Wray recognised when he gave that shout of anger, the girl was his Rana whom he believed to be in another village visiting her mother.

Before the white man reached the outside ring of the circle a dozen Ju-Ju men had sprung to their feet, and his way was effectually barred. Then he came back towards the king, swinging his arms and muttering to himself as he walked, whilst wishing that he had thought to bring his Winchester, or even a revolver.

"Karuah 'e be king heah, Messah Wray," murmured a friendly chief, laying a warning hand on the white man's shoulder.

"So he is, by God!" said Wray. And without a word he swung out his right arm and felled one of the king's brothers like an ox.

An amazed cry broke from the lips of a few chiefs, and was taken up by the crowd. But one could see that Karuah was only filled with admiration for the man who could do this thing. The king's brother stood six feet four in height, and was one of the strongest men in Jassa country. Therefore the move was, perhaps, not a bad one for Wray.

"You, Karuah!" shouted the white man

turning to the king. "That girl she be my Rana, you sabe, you old ruffian? Don't you dare to sacrifice her to your damned old Ju-Ju, or I'll—I'll bring white men here and shoot the whole lot of you down!" He stamped his foot on the red sand in a fury of anger. "You fools, she's worth the whole tribe of you put together, and you want to kill her to bring rain. You shan't, by the Lord!"

Karuah looked fixedly at Wray. He almost loved the man, and would have given a great deal rather than lose his good opinion.

"Yew, Messah Wray," he said, "yew be foolish, like 'a dunno wat. Yew no get sense. Me king heah, me no be Ju-Ju. Dem girl she be Ju-Ju girl, no b'long foh me—no foh yew. 'Spose she go foh sackreefice, dat be Ju-Ju p'laver, no be my p'laver. Me no can 'ellip, no moh pas' all dese udder men."

The king waved his hand towards the crowd of villagers, pausing then, to watch the effect of his words on the white man.

What Karuah said was perfectly true, for, though he were twenty times the king, he dared not sanction interference between the Ju-Ju men and a great religious function.

By this time all the priests were in the great canoe, waiting for the king and his brothers, and for the white man who tried to push his power so far.

The Ju-Ju men were squatting on the raised platform, in the centre of which sat Rana, still bound to the rough chair. Heavy weights of stone had been fastened under this seat, and as Wray looked a second time at the girl whose devotion in the past had touched him, the significant horror of this detail was borne in upon him with fresh force.

For the first time since his arrival at Jindra the white man felt helpless, though even now, he never doubted for a moment but that in some way he would by his presence be able to prevent the sacrifice.

"Come," said the king, laying his huge hand kindly on Wray's shoulder. "No good foh make so much trubbil foh one girl."

Then, followed by his two brothers and the white man, Karuah stepped into the canoe and sat down under the stern awning, whilst close on a hundred paddles flashed simultaneously into the brown water.

As the boat shot out into mid-stream, Wray

was alternately begging and threatening in front of the king.

"Karuah, you thief! I thought you bin straight man, an' your word all same my word. 'Spose you do this thing, Karuah, no white man ever speak you no more, you sabe? Oh, curse you, don't be a beast! Stop your boat, and let the child go ashore. Look here, take some other girl, if you must. Karuah, my good old friend, for God's sake stop it! You brute, I'll have you and your tribe hanged!"

Karuah looked pityingly down on his white friend, like a mare watching her foal kicking its heart out against the rails of a stock-yard.

"Yew no sabe, Wray. Me no can do not'ing. Wha' foh yew want dis girl? Me gib yew nudder girl—tew girl 'spose yew want 'um. Dis girl, she b'long foh Ju-Ju."

Wray's helplessness made him lose all self-control, and he raved and swore at Karuah, calling on the God of Christianity to paralyse these followers of Ju-Ju. Nothing happened, however, to change the current of events; and the place of sacrifice, where the Jindra creek joined the Benin river, was close at hand.

"Karuah," shouted Wray hoarsely, "I'll gi'e

you all dem white man's things from my camp 'spose you let her go. Don't laugh, you black devil! Karuah, I'll gi'e you everything same's white men have, s'pose you gi'e me this one girl."

The king shook his great head as he looked sadly at the white man, shrugging his shoulders to express again his powerlessness. The canoe was almost motionless now, having reached the opening into the main stream, and paddles were only kept going for the sake of steadying the craft in the rolling swell at the creek's mouth.

The Ju-Ju men were cutting the throats of goats and fowls, and throwing the carcasses into the yellow water. Fifty tom-toms were being beaten; a fire of leaves and Ju-Ju wood was sending up a solid column of white smoke from one end of the canoe; the officiating priests were droning out their melancholy chant; and high above them all, dry-eyed and terror-stricken, Rana in her white, flower-decked robe sat gazing at her white patron in the stern.

Wray was waving his arms before Karuah, and raving like a Hindoo fakir, when he heard a scream: "Messah Wray!"

The man ceased storming, and turned on the instant like a tiger at bay.

It was hard for Wray. He had not guessed the end was so near, and all he had time to see was a face pale under its natural gold colour, a pair of great, frightened black eyes, and two grey lips that were framing the words, "Messah Wray."

His little girl had followed the goats and fowls, and the face he saw was sinking in the turbid water at the river opening.

Wray gave a shout, and plunged feet first after the long, wavy hair which had so quickly disappeared.

King Karuah waved his hand, and in an instant a dozen black forms were shooting down through the yellow water after Wray.

The white man never reached the river bed, to which poor little Rana, on her heavily-weighted chair, had sunk like a stone. Half-a-dozen pairs of hands forced him up to the surface, and in another few minutes he was sitting, with head bowed and hands between his knees, under the awning of the king's war-canoe.

Little Rana, with her loving, dog-like ways and her reverential devotion, had touched a soft spot in a not very hard heart, during her

life in Wray's camp; and the man felt very sad, and very bitter now that he had lost her. Two or three times during the journey back to Jindra, the king addressed himself to Wray with a desire to soothe the white man's wrath.

Wray only shook his head, as he said, "No want you speak for me, Karuah. You no be straight man all same I think before."

And the Ju-Ju men, pleased at the idea of friction, which would tend to lessen the power of one who on a previous occasion had ventured to interfere with their proceedings, smiled at all this.

As the canoe was nearing the landing-place below Jindra, Wray was somewhat startled to hear the crack of a rifle-shot, and an indistinct noise of shouting.

"Hope Manuel's not doing a little sacrificing on his own account," muttered Wray, as he stepped out of the canoe with Karuah, and on to the river bank.

Slowly the procession of chiefs and Ju-Ju men wound along the narrow track from the river to the village, until Wray and the king, walking some distance before the others, reached the open space before the camp of the two part-

ners. There they paused, a cry of astonishment being forced from both by what they saw in the camp enclosure.

A little knot of women and children, and a few men who had not attended the river sacrifice, were standing in a semicircle before a portion of the rough palisading of the camp. Lying on the ground, his hands and feet tightly bound together with vine cords, was Wray's partner Manuel; and glaring down at him from the front rank of the little knot of women and children, was Adaio's son Jara, the lover of dead Rana.

CHAPTER XII

SHOWING HANDS

"Now, what the deuce is the meaning of this?" cried Wray, surprised into adopting the language of civilisation.

"Yew, Jara, wha' yew go foh do heah, huh?" queried the king, in a bellow. And then he walked by Wray's side into the enclosure.

So sick and disgusted was Wray, from his failure to save the life of the girl who had that day been sacrificed, that for a few moments the fact of his partner being bound hand and foot on the ground before him, conveyed to the man's mind little more than surprise and annoyance. Then, slowly, the nature of the situation began to dawn upon him, and he turned a little more pale as he realised that, whilst he had in a few hours made himself every one's enemy, and a defeated enemy at that, his partner was now in the position of an ordinary native prisoner.

Wray looked down at Menuel, and noticed

that his face was white and dogged and sullen, though his expression did not altogether suggest the resentment of an outrage. The moment was a trying one, and Wray felt that the fate of the firm was in a balance which could not but be very much affected by the events of the next few minutes.

The Ju-Ju men and the rest of the procession were pressing up to the camp entrance. So waving the leaders back with an authoritative gesture, Wray closed the heavy swing-gate, and walked to the door of the firm's big hut. A moment afterwards he returned with two revolvers in his pockets and his Winchester under one arm.

"Now then, you Jara," he said, turning to dead Rana's lover, "just kneel down and make unfast dem cords—one time, sabe?"

And Wray moved his rifle crosswise before him.

"Yew go foh devvil!" Jara's head was thrown back, and his open hand outstretched in a splendid gesture of savage defiance.

Jara had visited Naddah, and spoke fluent pidgeon English. But, as he spoke, the defiant glare died out of the handsome eyes, and a look

of brute submission, almost devotion, spread over his face, as he gazed at the white man whom Rana had loved.

"Ah, Messah Wray, yew can kill me one time, me no care; and—she no care, me sabe dat! Dis white man"—Jara pointed to the prostrate Manuel—" 'e no be ploper white man. 'E want 'um Rana, but she no want him, so 'e hate 'um like devvil. 'E hate yew, Messah Wray, 'cos Rana she love yew. 'E like foh kill yew, an' kill dem Rana both one time."

Wray was more than a little touched by the feeling the man displayed, and by his reference to Rana, of whose death he evidently knew nothing. Wray believed the native to be irresponsible and mad from jealousy, but he felt none the less the necessity that existed for immediate action on his part.

"But, you fool man," he said pityingly. "You think that, 'cos you be foolish fellow. Massah Manuel no kill me—no kill Rana—an' anyhow, 'spose he bin done this thing; den no be for you to make trubbil an' do what you do. Come, 'spose you no one time, very quick, unfast dem cord, me have to kill you, sabe?"

In the midst of a loud murmur from the crowd outside, which followed these words, Manuel turned on the ground and opened his lips for the first time since his partner's arrival.

"'Isté, shoot the beast, Amigo. Don't talk to him, but shoot."

"All right, old chap; you shall be up in a minute," replied Wray in a hurried whisper; "but I don't want to make the crisis worse than it is."

"Yes, yes!" said Jara, his eyes blazing again as he looked down at Manuel. "Yew be very glad 'spose me bin dead, Messah Manuel, 'cos den no can be palaver 'bout yew."

Then Jara looked up at the king and Wray, unmistakable honesty shining in his face, as he said—

"Dem man dere 'e no be ploper white man; 'e be theefe man, yew sabe? 'E wait foh dem time when all peepil go 'way foh de sackreefice, den 'e go foh theefe everything from de king's camp; den to steal everything from dis camp; den to go in canoe 'way to Naddah, 'an nevah come heah no moh', yew sabe?"

"Liar!" hissed the man on the ground;

and his black eyes flashed hatred at the native.

"Oho, yes, me bin liar—big liar!" ejaculated Jara. "An' dis man 'e bin very good man. Oho, but me no watch all time foh not'ing—watch 'im with Rana, watch 'im all time. To-day 'e go foh king's camp, an' me watch. 'E get king's big chain, wat 'e got now; an' me catch 'um den, an' make 'um fas' dese cords. Look now foh dem chain—king's chain!"

Bending down, Jara pulled into view from under Menuel's body a long, beaten-out gold chain; and as the crowd outside, recognising one of the great emblems of their king's royalty, murmured threateningly, Menuel from his place on the ground spat and ground his teeth, as though he would have bitten the hand of his accuser.

"He's a liar! He stole the chain and put it there himself," said Menuel, looking up into his partner's face.

"Yes, everybody bin liars, all 'cep' Messah Menuel," said Jara, waving his hand towards three of the women in the enclosure, who were chattering excitedly in the vernacular.

Wray turned to King Karuah, lowering his

voice as he said: "Me no sabe all dis. It no be proper true palaver, dat me sabe. My friend 'e be white man, and he no can do this thing. Karuah, you must be proper all same white king, an' bimeby we palaver and find out what be proper truth. Now, dis Jara he must unfast dese cords an' let Massah Manuel loose, you sabe. 'Spose no, den——"

Wray touched the barrel of his Winchester significantly, and Karuah motioned to Jara to do as he was bid. So, slowly, the chief's son unbound the vine cords, and Manuel rose to his feet a free man again.

The women of the little knot within the enclosure, raised their shrill voices higher and chattered a little faster; and the men outside growled ominously, as the Maltese muttered to his partner—

"Give me one of your revolvers, partner; I must have one point in arguing with the brutes."

CHAPTER XIII

A TEST HAND

KING KARUAH had considerable respect for Menuel's power, as shown in various ways ; but mingled with that respect was none of the affection, the feeling which was almost love, which the king felt for the younger partner who had saved his life. And Karuah saw, or believed he saw, truth in Jara's face, and a lie in Menuel's. Therefore, his respect for the white man fell, and there was nothing behind it to take its place.

"What you want me to do?" said Menuel sullenly, as, wheeling round from Wray's side, he faced the king. "Jara 'e say one thing ; me say that thing be lie. You go for b'leeve dis man or me, huh?"

Karuah's good-humoured face showed clearly that he was half ashamed of himself for being doubtful ; but he said slowly, "Me no sabe

good. Lis Jara e' be chief's son an' plover fellow. Messah Mennei, me sen' foh my Ju-Ju men an' chiefs; den we palaver foh dis t'ing, huh? Me no sabe what white man do, but da's my country fash" (fashion). "No be plover, Messah Wray, huh?"

"Well, yes, that seems fair enough," said Wray, without noticing his partner's angry scowl. "Yes, Karuah, me think that proper."

The king waved the long bamboo rod he carried, and the leading men amongst his priests and chiefs began to troop into the little enclosure.

Mennel's face whitened for a moment, and then he laughed sneeringly, as, turning on his heel, he said, "Oh, well, you can palaver, and be damned to you! I'm going out—down to the river, while you jaw. Sabe that, King Karuah? Me go 'way for little time, an' you can palaver with your Ju-Ju men, an'—curse you—with my good partner, if you like, to your heart's content."

The king's honest face was turned to Wray, and for a moment his unspoken appeal seemed to be—

"My brother, he is your friend, and his skin

dubious. Just then Jara, the son of Adaio, noticed a canoe-man walking slowly along the winding track from the creek to the village. This gave Jara an idea.

"Oho," said he, turning to the king. "'Spose you want know if me bin liar all same what Messah Menuel 'e say; den let evlybody come with me foh de river, and we look dem canoe what Messah Menuel 'e get ready for go Naddah, dem time 'e done theefe de gold—huh? 'Spose we no find 'um canoe, me bin liar."

"Aha, me b'leeve d'as bin bes' t'ing said to-day," said the king.

"Yes, that'll settle it," assented Wray, looking frankly at his partner. "Come on, old man, and get the thing over."

So the whole gathering trooped out along the river track, Menuel perforce accompanying the chiefs who guarded him. As the party neared the beach of the little inlet, the chief of the Ju-Ju men was arguing and pleading with Karuah to reinstate their patron without further trouble.

"Dem Jara," said the Ju-Ju man, "'e be no good, an' think moh foh de dead girl dan any udder thing. Dis Messah Menuel 'e be fine white man, an' 'e be good man for yew, an' foh

is white, like yours ; but—is this a white man's way ? ”

The next instant showed the king more thoroughly a king than Wray had yet seen him. His eyes flashed towards Menuel's retreating form as he said, “Yew, Messah Menuel, me think yew no better go 'way from heah. Better yew stop foh dis camp, what time we p'laver dis ting. 'Spouse yew speak trew, an' Jara speak lie, wha' foh yew want go 'way, huh ? ”

Two or three chiefs blocked Menuel's way out of the enclosure ; and, seeing the odds were against him, the Maltese leaned heavily upon the palisading, and so stood, with a sneer on his face, as the head men gathered round Karuah and Wray to hear the latter plead his partner's cause.

Their very opposition to Wray had from the first made the Ju-Ju men lean towards Menuel ; and now they were inclined to join issue with the younger man in the defence of his friend. The chiefs, who, on the contrary, loved Wray, and only feared Menuel, took the other side, and the case became one of Church against State. The people being in this instance on the side of the State, Menuel's chances seemed

Jindra. Yew no sabe me think, 'e bin done buy dem Rana foh himselif, an' giv de girl to Ju-Ju foh de sackreefice to-day."

Wray heard this last remark, and sprang round towards his partner with a glimmering of something in his eyes, which was reminiscent to the Maltese of the night in Las Palmas, months before, when they had first met. Even the crowd of natives, who understood no word of the pidgeon English spoken, stood still in the narrow, mangrove-skirted track, knowing instinctively that some change had come in the position of affairs.

So, the partners—these two white men who had been more than kings, and had lived as brothers—glared into each other's faces; the one questioning, the other defiantly admitting, both standing alone in that strange crowd, alone in all Africa. Then, as open hatred shone more insolently in Manuel's face, the question left Wray's blue eyes, and he realised the situation.

"So, you stole little Rana to kill her, since she wouldn't—Oh,—you—thing!"

That was all. Manuel said nothing, but only glared dogged defiance. Then the party moved on again towards the beach.

Wray did not care two straws about his partner's alleged dishonesty and deliberately planned robbery. Up till that moment he had not believed either possible. Now it seemed immaterial. In one flash glance he had looked right into the heart of the Maltese, and had seen there, black, jealous hatred and bitter treachery. Now, however, he had no time to think of what steps he should take, for at that moment the party reached the river bank, just below the little inlet.

Jara, with three friends of his father, had led the procession, walking some distance ahead. Now, as the king and Wray, followed by the Ju-Ju men, stepped from out the mangroves on to the beach, they saw Jara and his companions in the act of dragging a couple of natives out of the stern of a long canoe, which lay moored to heavy stones, and half hidden by overhanging mangroves and creepers.

This canoe was laden heavily with various valuables from the king's camp. The two trembling boatmen were protesting that they only had acted under "Messah Menuel's" orders in waiting there for him.

King Karuah swore loudly in the vernacular,

as turning to his chief Ju-Ju man, he said, "Huh, what yew t'ink now 'bout yoh good white man, hah? What yew t'ink me goin' do foh him now, huh?"

The Ju-Ju man shook his head solemnly. "Oho, Jara 'e done speak plover dis time. 'Spose yew mus' kill dis Messah Menuel foh suah!"

"My fadder, yes!" ejaculated Karuah, as he signalled two of his chiefs to seize and guard more carefully the Maltese. "Foh suah me go kill 'um when 'e be theefe man, an'—— Huh, what be dis come now?"

The beach where the king stood was crowded, and, following the direction of Karuah's gaze, every one saw for the first time that a canoe, manned by twenty paddlers, had passed the bend of the stream below Jindra, and now was rapidly approaching the inlet.

Two minutes afterwards the strange boat was beached, and in a hush of absolute silence there stepped ashore a white woman, who, followed by two natives, walked straight up to where the king stood with Wray, before the chiefs and Menuel.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST THROW

"DEM canoe, 'e be Naddah boat," remarked Jara, sententiously, as he stared in astonishment at the craft from which the white woman had stepped.

In Africa she was distinctly a white woman, though in England the heliotrope tinge in her finger-nails, her lank, blue-black hair, and her skin of rich yellow—all would have been taken as evidences of the racial bar sinister which comes from over the border-line of the white folks' horizon. Still, white she was to the crowd of savages who stood on that little river beach, and white even to Wray, who had not seen a skin lighter in hue than burnished copper, or a costume suggestive of the North—other than his partner's and his own—for several months.

As the woman stepped up to Karuah, Manuel made one articulate and characteristic sound: "Istó!" and then he stepped backward, hur-

riedly, amongst the Ju-Ju men. But the hands of Jara's father and another chief, who thought he was trying to escape the native penalty of detected theft, were laid roughly upon his shoulders; and even the Ju-Ju men drew back from their one-time favourite, lest they should be accused of trying to shield a thief from justice.

"No, no," said Jara's father; "dat no can be, Messah Menuel."

"Who the devil do you think wants to run from you?" hissed the Maltese, as the forefinger of his right hand twitched on the trigger of his revolver. "Hold your tongue, you fool—with your 'Messah Menuel.'"

Instinctively, and without any intention of taking precedence of a king—even an African river king—Dick Wray moved forward to meet the woman who had hairpins and a gown. Racial kinships are strong, and so is femininity.

The white man raised the palm-leaf structure which he called a hat; and the newcomer, dazzled somewhat by the glitter of sunshine, from which the canoe awning had up till now sheltered her, bowed, gracefully enough, looking

up then at the faces among the crowd. Manuel, at that time, was hidden by the chiefs.

"Are you Mr. Wray?" asked the woman in a musical, but not very strong, voice.

"I am," replied Wray, with more than a little surprise in his tone.

"Ah!" And then a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, after which the weak voice deepened, and gained in strength and intensity; the yellow skin flushed; and the weary, submissive look on the woman's face gave place to fiery wrath and bitterness, which made her black eyes smoulder like torch-ends in darkness.

"Then you can take me to my husband—your partner—Mr. John Albert Manuel, of London and Canary; thief and villain, who shamed me openly before the island folk, and, having robbed me of—everything, left me to starve with my children. Where is he, this clever London merchant? Sir, you are a gentleman—take me to him!"

The last words were imperial in the strength of command they conveyed. Wray glanced towards Karuah, to whom only a portion of all this had been intelligible; and then, turning again to the woman before him, he said—

"I hope you won't think me indifferent, nor yet interfering, but would you mind telling me what you expect to gain by seeing your—Mr. Menuel? I mean, why you want to find him here in this place—where—er—social laws and that sort of thing, are not of much account?"

"Why I want to find him?" The woman drew up her slight figure with Southern imperiousness, as she slowly repeated Wray's words. "Ah! holy Virgin, what a question!"

"Well, you see," began Wray, blushing almost in his embarrassment, "Mr. Menuel's present position is rather peculiar. A charge of—er—an offence has been brought against him, and at this moment, I believe, the powers here are deliberating as to what punishment——"

Another long-drawn sigh of satisfaction from the woman interrupted Wray, and the expression in her smouldering eyes made him wheel round in time to see his partner, Menuel, moving away from the chiefs who had held him, and stepping forward into the open space where the king stood.

"Here I am, Neta. Now what have you to say?"

Wray, having turned to the woman again, could not take his eyes from her thin face, so strange was the passage of emotions he saw there. One gleam of old, submissive, dog-like devotion, such as dead Rana's face might have shown; then out-flashed contempt and bitter scorn; and again, spreading itself over that, triumphant hate and consciousness of revenge attained, lighted and took possession of this strange woman's features.

"What have I to say to you, John Manuel? Ah, well! I have to say that I have found you, as you see. That I know all you did and tried to do, to me and mine. That I know of the English wife, and she knows of me. Do you understand? That my children—your children—have not starved in Las Palmas, as you would wish. That the time when I was glad to be your slave came to an end. That the love of even a poor island woman may turn to hate—bitter hate—for the man who tries to crush her. That you could not escape me though you crossed a dozen oceans, for I would follow you, and bring you back to take away the shame you threw on me and mine. That I hate you—hate you, John Manuel; you—dog!"

Menuel's white face had shown only amused contempt during this tirade, and now, his thin lips, though grey and bloodless, curled sneeringly as he said: "Is that all, you unfortunate mad-woman? Is that all you've crossed an ocean for? What do you think I care for your half-caste brats, or for you and your shame? You—fool—this is not an English city. I could sell you here for a slave if any one were fool enough to buy such truck. 'Isté, you've had a long tramp for nothing, my poor lunatic."

Still with a sneer on his face, Menuel turned to Wray as to one who might endorse his opinions. Wray looked coldly down at the ground; and the woman, turning again to him, laughed bitterly as she said—

"You hear him, this clever Englishman, who married me in Las Palmas Cathedral ten years ago, and for eight years treated me as no man could treat a dog. Starved me, beat me, did things—Oh, Mother of Heaven! things words will not tell of. Now he sends me about my business—me! You say he is accused of something here. Be sure he has done it, whatever it is. Let them punish him. He is liar, thief, forger, he——"

"Hold your tongue, you ——." Manuel took two threatening steps towards her; but the woman did not even look at him. Her blazing eyes swept round the crowd of listening natives, resting finally on Wray and the king, as, with one hand upraised, she said—

"And now I have found him—this man who married me. My children—Jesu pity them!—are dead, though I would have hidden that from him, because he, fiend, is pleased by it. Dead—starved—left to die with me when he had brought me back to my home in the islands and cast me off as useless—said I was no wife of his. And in London I had slaved to death for him, while he married an English wife, and beat me, and lived, like the dog he is, on my shame."

"Liar!" Manuel sprang forward towards the woman, as this one word came hissing from between his clenched teeth. And his revolver was levelled at her head.

Wray jumped forward and struck blindly at the hand that held the revolver.

But the effort was, perhaps, unnecessary. Suddenly as a flash of summer lightning, the island woman's hand had shot into the bosom

of her gown, and a long steel blade flashed out into the sunlight over Menuel's breast.

"Ah, coward, always—but, you die first!"

Almost instantly, and with only a faint "'Isté" from between closed jaws, Menuel fell at full length on the red sand, and lay there twitching convulsively, the handle of the woman's Spanish dagger quivering over his heart.

The thin, yellow woman was as fully revenged as she could ever be; and it was not pity certainly which made Wray and the king, with a dozen others, bend over the white man, whilst all the crowd gazed down at his dying form.

Within three minutes Menuel had breathed his last, with a savage Southern curse on his lips, and the bitter light of hatred shining through the film which spread over his eyes.

Then Wray and the king rose to their feet, and, the crowd gazing with them, looked for the woman who in self-defence had done this thing.

Round the bend of the stream a hundred yards below Jindra, they saw the twenty paddles of her canoe flashing in and out the

sunlit water. And as these disappeared from view, a shout of farewell from the boatmen came ringing through the hot air, telling the wondering crowd on the beach that the white woman's aim was accomplished, and her business in Jindra ended.

And that night, Dick Wray, with the help of a couple of natives, buried his dead partner under the mangroves on the river bank. For Wray was unable to feel for the dead man, the same loathing he had had for the living thief.

On the next day Wray bade good-bye to King Karuah.

"Wha' for yew go 'way now, Messah Wray?" said Karuah, with very evident regret.

"Oh! no be nothing here for me now, you sabe," replied the white man. "Me no can live in Jindra no more. You let 'um Ju-Ju men go kill dem Rana; my friend 'e be theefe man and die; nothing no more heah for me!"

The king tried persuasion, but Wray was firm, and saddened a good deal, by all that had happened. "Besides," he said to Karuah, in explanation, "me go for find that white woman, and give her all things what belong for Menuel, you sabe!"

"Ah!" replied the king. "Me t'ink dat woman no take 'um—no want Menuel's t'ings."

So Wray said good-bye to his friend the king, and moisture gathered in Karuah's eyes. The Englishman drew together all the gold and coral and valuables belonging to the firm, and the king's servants carried them down to his old canoe—the *Ace of Trumps*. Then Jara, the chief's son, begged to be allowed to come, with his own men as crew, in the canoe of the white man who had been beloved of Rana. Wray assented to this, and every soul in Jindra, from the king to the troops of little naked pickaninies, at whom Wray used to smile as he passed them lying about in the warm, red dust of the village—all crowded down on to the beach, to see the last of the white man whom nearly all of them had loved.

Karuah, at the last moment, sent down a great calabash of gold in dust and beaten nuggets, as a present to Wray, who, in turn, presented his Winchester and a box of ammunition to the king. Then, in the midst of wailing and shouting, the canoe was pushed off from the beach, and started for Benin river and Naddah.

Wray stood before the hoop awning of the

Ace of Trumps, and shouted his farewells to Karuah and Jindra generally. Karuah, huge and magnificent in his emotion, stepped up to his knees in the river as the canoe shot away.

“Good-bye, Messah Wray!” he shouted; one great arm raised high over his head. “Good-bye! Yew—yew be ploper white man—huh!”

CHAPTER XV

WINNINGS

EXACTLY five weeks and six days after the death of Manuel on the beach at Jindra, the steamship *Fernando*, from the West Coast of Africa, dropped anchor in the harbour of Las Palmas, Canary ; and Dick Wray, a passenger by this vessel, stepped into the Santa Madroño hotel-boat to be rowed ashore.

He had discarded the palm-leaf headgear, and, clothed in an ordinary travelling suit, looked quite the conventional Englishman, save for the fact that the savage, open-air life of Jindra had tanned his skin to a rich, old-saddle brown. He was thinner, too, and harder-looking than when he had left Canary eight months before, to play another hand in the game of life with Albert John Manuel. Otherwise, when he took his seat in the roomy hotel-boat, with its hangings of crimson cloth, Dick Wray was just the same careless, blue-eyed Englishman, plus a

touch of sadness which his face had worn ever since the end of the old Australian days, as he had been before the West African trip.

"How are things at the Santa Madroño?" asked Wray, turning to the gold-braided official who sat beside him in the boat.

"Oh, very good, sir," said the man. "The island is full of visitors, and business is brisker than usual."

"Ah! Do you remember whether any passengers were landed here by the last boat from the Coast?"

"Well, now, let me see. Yes; there was a missionary just getting over his fever—he's gone to Quiney's. Then there was Digby Farn's agent at Carra Adoa—he's staying with us; and I believe there was an island woman—resident here, you know—who had been down the Coast to her husband, or something."

"Yes," said Wray thoughtfully. "You don't happen to know what her name was, do you?"

"No, sir; can't say I do. But—Perez!"

The hotel courier turned to one of his boatmen, and asked the man in Spanish if he knew the name of the woman who had arrived by the last week's boat from the West Coast. The

boatman answered readily enough, and turning again to Wray, the courier said—

“Perez tells me the woman was known by the name of Menuel, and lived in a little lane called Santa Marie Street, behind the cathedral here.”

“Ah, thank you! I fancied I might have met the lady somewhere on the Coast, that’s all,” said Wray. And then, lighting a cigarette, he remained silent till the hotel was reached half-an-hour afterwards.

Later in the afternoon, when his baggage, which included several strong and weighty wooden cases, had been deposited in a room at the Santa Madroño; Wray ordered a petana and drove through the quaint old island city to the cathedral of Las Palmas. There he dismissed the petana driver, and strolled quietly along one of the side streets which open out of the cathedral square.

Presently he reached an intersection of streets so narrow that two men could hardly have passed abreast between their high, white walls. Looking up at this corner, which he remembered having visited before, he saw painted on one of the walls the words, “Santa Marie Street.”

"Menuel—Mrs. Menuel. Sabe that name?" he inquired of a tall, wizened-looking island-man whom he saw a minute later.

"Menuel? Ha, you be Englise, si?" asked the islander.

Wray nodded and thanked his questioner, when that individual offered to lead him to Mrs. Menuel's house. Arrived at a rickety little one-storey building, near the end of the street, Wray found a West India negro who spoke very good English, lolling lazily out of one of the windows.

"Does Mrs. Menuel live here?" he asked, after dismissing his guide with a tip upon which that grandee would live in luxury for a week.

"Wall, guess she did, 'bout ez late ez she lived anywheres," replied the coloured gentleman.

"And now?"

"Reckin she's in heaven, sah, en' doin' well, ef havin' tarnation bad time down here means 'er good time after. She 'rrived this establishment from the Coast lass' Thursday evenin', en' she jes' laid down en' died, quiet ez a possum, 'bout midnight."

"Did she leave any children or relatives of any kind, do you know?"

"Nary one," replied the negro, burying his white teeth in the end of a long plug of tobacco. "Her three pick'ninnies died 'fore she went to th' Coast, an' her mother en' th' old man were called to glory two years back en' more. Nary soul did she leave, 'less you count th' old yaller cat. But say, boss, ef there's a fortune lef' her, guess th' dollars ought ter come right here, for I buried her over th' hill there myself, en' 'er derned long jog it was too!"

"No," said Wray slowly. "There isn't any fortune; but"—he drew out his pocket-book—"I met Mrs. Menuel's husband once, and—well, since you buried her, if a ten-pound note's any good to you, you're very welcome."

"Great sakes alive! A ten—Gee-wosh! Say, boss, I——"

But Wray was half-way down the narrow street, and had reached the corner where he had first seen Menuel, before Mr. James Abraham Lincoln Smith had reached the middle of his prose poem of thanks.

"Poor woman!" muttered Wray pityingly, as he emerged into the cathedral square, "I wish I could have caught her before she left the Coast—Hullo! Great Scot! there's that little wine-shop."

Wray was passing the little cabaret behind the Hotel du Quatro Naciones, in which he had sat drinking slate-blue wine with Mr. John Albert Menuel.

"Well, well!" he muttered, "I must go up and taste that wine again, in the weird little loft place. Gad, it's a tribute to the memory of the departed; and after all—white or streaky—that partner of mine did make a rich man of me, as he said he would—a ridiculously rich man. H'm! He cheated over our final hand, but—yes; he was a daring player. I must drink to Menuel's memory, and to his Majesty, Karuah!"

So Wray climbed slowly up the railed ladder of the little wine-shop, and sat down to smoke and to think, over a glass of thin Las Palmas wine.

M A M ' Z E L L E

MAM'ZELLE

"Gone deeper than all plummet's sound,
Where in the dim green dayless day
The life of such things lies bound
As the sea feeds on, wreck and stray
And castaway."

"Live and let live, as I will do,
Love and let love, and so will I.
But, sweet, for me no more with you :
Not while I live, not though I die.
Good night, good-bye."

—SWINBURNE.

HE was of Irish extraction, handsome and slender in build. His name was Horace Rorke, and that is all I knew of him, except that he was a friend of mine, and that I liked him. He made me like him, when we were going down the Mersey on our way to West Africa in the *Calabar*. Long before we reached Sierra Leone he had made an old familiar friend of me.

He had never been to the Coast before, and was going to Prowrah, at the time of which

I speak, as resident agent for a Hamburg firm.

I had been stationed at Prowrah for eighteen months, and was then going out to work after six months' furlough at home. . I fancy Rorke had been rather making things hum in some way before he accepted this Coast engagement. But so have most men who go to the Coast, and they are not the worst men in the world, unless when the bite of the cocktail enters too deeply into their souls. And with such—God rest their souls!—it is only a matter of months.

Horace Rorke was not of this breed. He was young. The skin round his eyes was smooth. He read Shelley, and was a clean-run, rather nervous young man, with an imagination. Therefore I smiled and sighed when I thought of him as Schmidt & Kusch's agent at Prowrah.

"What's the news?" I asked of old Dr. O'Hara, when he came aboard the *Calabar* in Prowrah to welcome me back.

"Well, the only important item is one you won't believe till you see it," said the Doctor. "So come along. My surf-boat's alongside. They'll send the baggage later on."

"Hold on," I said. "Let me introduce you

to my friend, Horace Rorke. Dr. O'Hara, Messrs. Schmidt & Kusch's new agent. You two must be friends."

"Ha! Glad to welcome you to the Coast, Mr. Rorke. I was going to say, I hope we shan't make friends too soon. I don't mean that, though. Only my acquaintance is generally more or less forced on a white man here, sooner or later."

"Never mind, Doctor. It's always a good thing to have," said I. "Now let's hear this incredible news of yours."

"Well, you know the Lamotte people, of the French settlement above Lagos?"

We had left the ship, and I had to lean forward to catch the Doctor's words between the yells of his Kroo-boy paddlers. I nodded my answer to his question.

"Since you've been away they have built an hotel here — weather - board and shingle, you know, with a swagger balcony in front."

"Nonsense! An hotel? In Prowrah?"

"Think of it, my boy! A real hotel. I believe they've a couple of bed-rooms, and a bar—a genuine bar, with little tables, and shelves full of bottles and glasses and things. They opened

it last month. And you can drop in after dinner now, and drink a dozen different kinds of liqueurs and other poisons—absinthe, my boy!—draught beer! Think of it! And that's not the most wonderful part of it, either."

"Doctor! Are you sure this is not a new hoax? There never has been but one bar on the Coast, from Cape Verde to Fernando Po."

"Eh? What about the Forcados river bar, and the bar you cross going up to Lagos?"

"Um!—yes. But in Prowrah. Great Scot! And you said that wasn't the most wonderful part. You mustn't make it too steep, you know, otherwise even your unimpeachable reputation—er——"

"Just so. Well, I knew you wouldn't believe it till you saw it, so I told Mam'zelle to have two big, long drinks ready, with a taste of the devil in 'em, for when you came ashore. We shall want three now."

"Mam—how much? Who's that?"

"Ah, now I've done it. That's the most wonderful part of the whole concern."

"Oh, go ahead, Doctor. Don't mind me. You've had a music-hall built, and there's a chorus and a ballet, and an Empire prome-

nade, where old King Jarah parades his wives around. And you've done away with black-water fever, and the Coast is a real first-chop place. I shall take it all in like a lamb."

"Yes, of course. I knew you'd laugh at it. But wait a few minutes, and you shall see. Mam'zelle Lisè Dinan is the barmaid. And from Paris, at that. She's a café chantant in herself, and she could marry any one on the Coast, from the Governor of Lagos, or the last new subaltern, down to King Jarah, or one of my boat-boys."

And it was not a hoax, this story of the Doctor's, but an unvarnished fact, as in a very short time I had good reason to know. And this, too, was before the days of the accession of Queen-Empress Nelly in Sierra Leone, and at a time when the honourable profession of which Mademoiselle Lisè Dinan was an ornament, had no single representative throughout the length and breadth of mangrove-land.

Mam'zelle was dainty. Fascinating with the pale chic of the Parisienne demi-monde. She was all this in my eyes. And the breath of London in June had not yet left my nostrils. To men living at Prowrah when she arrived—

there were no white women in Prowrah, with the exception of Mrs. Arlitz at the Swiss Mission station—Mam'zelle, with her flounces and little jingling bangles, her violet eyes and tense vivacity, her lisping English, and her endless gaiety of the boulevards; Mam'zelle was frou-frou embodied; perfection; the ideal of all things beautiful and not African.

Old Major Randall who, two years before, had been ordered off everything smelling of alcohol, had, since the opening of the hotel, brought himself to death's very door by drinking countless lemon squashes of the fair Lisè's concoction. No one thought of sending to O'Hara's house when the Doctor was wanted in a hurry. All messages for whosoever intended, were, if urgent, sent to the hotel. And if at any time the exigencies of Prowrah's civilisation made the presence of a civil servant at his office absolutely necessary, a boy was despatched to Mam'zelle, with Mr. So-and-so's compliments, and would she ask Mr. — to step up to the — office?

Hers was a position unparalleled in the annals of the bar, without precedent in femininity's history, undreamt of by frou-frou's chroniclers.

One side of a continent her realm, men of every grade and colour her subjects, Mam'zelle on her throne in the Prowrah hotel, smiled and lisped, and cooed and sparkled, with fine impartiality, at all who paid tribute to her state. And all did this, from the £10 per month clerks of the four factories, to Chief Justice Manton-Carr.

Then came Horace Rorke, to take Herr Mittmann's place as agent for Messrs. Schmidt & Kusch.

For three weeks Herr Mittmann remained. Rorke was being schooled to the business and the climate. And all went comparatively well, though, even then, I thought it a regrettable circumstance that Rorke should have been installed in a matter of course way among the first half-dozen of Mam'zelle's most serious courtiers.

Unfortunately, Horace Rorke was very handsome. He would have been far and away the best-looking man in Prowrah had he worn sack-cloth and ashes, or a tall hat, or any other garb of ugliness. In spotless white duck, crimson sash, and snowy Panama head-gear, he was a sight to brighten sore eyes, not to mention

Mam'zelle's violet orbs, with their borderland of shadow over cream, and their reedy fringe of ripple-tipped lashes.

Then Herr Mittmann left Prowrah for the land of his fathers. Not heaven, or the other place, but Germany. So Rorke's time, and other things, were practically his own to make the most of, the best of, or the worst of. The time of three clerks and half-a-dozen natives, was also at his disposal; or their own, as Rorke chose to decree.

A month passed, and the cloud banks of Horace Rorke's sky massed themselves in more or less lurid rifts. His atmosphere was surcharged. An explosion seemed imminent. Sparks danced in hot air off the electric stream between Rorke's quarters and Mam'zelle Lisè's throne. The tireless vim, the exhaustless vivacity of the boulevard chanteuse; pitted against the boiling emotionality of the idealising Celt. One could not ask, "From which bank will the first flash come?" As well might one have asked, "Which will sparkle longest, a diamond, or the flare of an oil-soaked shred of cotton?"

By this time he had, of course, taken to the

morning cocktail. And to the afternoon cocktail. And to the cocktail of the evening; that which is slight in bulk and pungent in flavour. Otherwise, with the thermometer at ninety-three in dripping West Coast shade, he could never have stood a week of the life he was leading. That is, his mental half would have ceased to spur his physical half into activity. As it was his mental side flogged, and his physical side panted, but galloped. Galloped furiously. And a blue tinge began to spread under his frank Celtic eyes. One could see the lines forming from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth.

Women of a certain type are very quick learners. Mam'zelle put quinine in Rorke's cocktails, without asking him, and as a regular thing now.

One knows everything that happens on a West Coast beach. One night, when five weeks had elapsed since Herr Mittmann's final handing over of things to his Irish successor, I knew that Rorke, my friend, had asked Mam'zelle to marry him, then and there, in Prowrah. Heaven knows what he had pleaded for before that. This was what he asked now. And the Parisienne had looked up at him through the silky

straying hair which clung to her moist forehead, and had said she would give him his answer in two years. Not a word, a day before. She must fulfil her two years' engagement.

Then Rorke, doubtless thinking despairingly of the Major—a wealthy man as West Africans go—and a round dozen of others, had offered to marry Mam'zelle and let her retain her engagement. Mam'zelle's shoulders had risen ever so little. Her eyes and fingers had given twenty-five valid causes of the impossibility of this. Her lips had said, with a dainty Parisian oath, that the thing could not be.

"Cher 'Orais" would wait. Of this Mam'zelle was very sure.

Meantime, Dr. O'Hara gave "cher 'Orais" just three days to walk about in, before becoming the worst fevered man in West Africa. This unless something were done immediately.

"I don't know that I've ever seen quite so plain a case," said the Doctor to me. "And we know how such things must end—here. Only, as they say in the hospitals, Rorke's case is very typical. Very typical."

"Gad, it's too bad that she should add him to her list at all," I said. "And that he should

be the scapegoat. It's the devil. Can't something be done, Doctor?"

"Well, shure I don't know. It's an awkward matter to meddle with things like this."

"But he's very white, Doctor. He's very clean run. It's awful waste."

"Ay! It's awful waste, sure enough. But what th' divil will ye do? See here! To single men—men outside, I mean—a pretty woman, let alone a bundle of sparkle and divildom like Mam'zelle, is not just a pretty woman, an' nothin' else. Ye know that. That's for bat-eyed folk, an' men of the towns. To your outside man, she means frou-frou, lights, music, dancin' movement, divildom, an' the colour o' things. The sowl of all that she is. Th' embodiment, summit, sowl, and centre, is what the pretty woman represents. An' all these other intangibilities revolve round her, in the eyes of a man like Rorke. He was born of us an' th' outside kind, shure enough. Haven't I seen mighty bad endings to cases far less pronounced in the East, than what our friend's is here in th' West. And aren't I sorry? But pwhat the divil can ye do?"

"Well, I thought——"

"Hold on, now! Wait there a moment."

The Doctor bolted out into his verandah, where two or three native boys sat, and as he returned, I heard him say, "An' mind, ye spawn of Aigypyt, you go quick, one time. An' you speak him no go for dis place till 'e see me—till e' see Doctor 'Hara. Sabe? One time, now!"

"Ye see," said O'Hara, dropping again into the hammock-chair at my side. "Ye'll allow that she means frou-frou an' lights an' music, an' everything exotic, to that poor divil of a Rorke. Won't ye now?"

I nodded.

"I know it's not your way to disallow anything, ye cold-blooded pike. But as it happens this is true—true as gospel. Well, shure I'm no Homeopath. Ye can't be if ye live on the Coast. Well, then, the antithesis of exoticism is open-airism, isn't ut? She's frou-frou, an' nerves, an' music, and lights. Th' complement of that is skin, and flesh, an' sunshine, an' sinuousness, isn't it? Open air against scent, muscle against nerves, sunshine against cock-tails, moist glisten against powder. D'ye take me?"

"I begin to think so. Doctor, you're a genius. Go right ahead."

"Don't laugh at th' old man till ye're out of th' wood. My metaphors are better mixed than these cocktails. May th' devil take that boy o' mine. I'll be mixing my foot with—— Boy! come here, to ye're old master, an' fill these glasses. Make 'im p'loper dis time. Sabe? We'll, d'ye see, young Kedra—ye know Chief Kedra from Benin side?—Kedra's been in town these two days, an' he's going back to Benin to-night. That is, he thinks so. My idea is he'll wait till to-morrow. We'll throw a few things together, an' go up the river with him in his big war-canoe, for a few days' shooting. There's game of all kinds Benin way—beyond the settlement, you know, and up towards Benin city—an' ye can always fall back on parrots an' alligators, anyhow. Then at the last minute we somehow blarney Rorke into coming, an' keep him away for a fortnight."

"Um! But, you know, Doctor——"

"Ye think ye couldn't get him to come? Well, I should have to leave that part of it to you. He's your friend."

"No! It isn't that. I could easily make him come. I should tell him we'd only be gone a few days."

"Yes! An' th' good Lord only knows how many o' my patients will take the single journey in that time."

"But even so. If we did take him, I fancy——"

"Phwat? Get out with ye, man! You leave that part of it to me. You trust ye're old doctor, who's not such a fool as he looks. I tell ye there's nothin' like it in the Pharmacopœia; an' 'ts safe as seidlitz. I'll make him handle a paddle, an' shoot mosquitoes at a hundred yards. I'll give him such a father and a mother 'av a sweatin' an' a bakin', that he'll forget he's got any nerves. He'll be afraid to look at Mam'zelle in case she breaks. He'll expect a woman to weigh ten stun. By th' Lord! but he'll ask for mate and drink, plenty of ut, and sleep. An' they're the finest things in th' wurld, an' dead poison to Mam'zelle madness an' frou-frou."

"By Gad! Doctor, we'll do it."

"Do ut? Of course we will. An' if he goes back to it after that——But I think I

know th' boy better. A man doesn't go out o' the sunshine to sit over a fire."

I was thoroughly warmed by the Doctor's enthusiasm.

"Come on then," I said. "Let's go round and talk to Rorke. He'll be having breakfast now. It's past eleven o'clock."

"Hould on, me son!" said the Doctor. "Just a word in your ear. It's always well to have a woman on ye're side when ye can, or at worst, not against ye. You go round to Rorke. You know him best. I'll go on to the lady. Faith, I think I know her best. I'll just secure her neutraleety, an' I'll come round to your place at twelve. Then we'll go down to see Kedra together. He's a foine specimen of a savage, an' young an' all as he is, he's a daughter that 'ud bring tears t' th' eyes of Saint Anthony."

So the Doctor hurried off through the dazzling heat of the morning, like the good-hearted fellow he was, to secure Mam'zelle's "neutraleety." And I told my hammock-bearers to run me down to Rorke's quarters beside Schmidt & Kusch's factory.

I found Rorke sitting half-naked on his back

verandah, striving valiantly to pour into himself appetite for breakfast. The means, of course, were cocktails of an ominously lurid crimson. And the end, to judge from general appearances, and from the untouched state of his breakfast-table, was by no means within easy reach.

"Ah, old man! Just in time to join me at chop. How are you?"

His voice shook, but not so noticeably as did his hand, when he leaned across the table to greet me.

"I was just on the verge of an appetizer. Will you join me, or can you manage without?"

Poor Rorke! For all his shrunken cheeks and hollow eyes, he was a handsome fellow. But, as I noticed the deepening yellow, the filmy eyes, the black shading off into blue below, and the parched look; I began to wonder whether my friend could stand the Doctor's "father and a mother 'av a sweatin' an' a bakin'," or whether we were not perhaps a day or two behind the fair. Rorke looked very, very used up, even as men go on the Coast. And I was not looking for bright eyes and fruity cheeks.

At first Rorke laughed at the idea of his making one in my shooting party. He pleaded business, with a questioning glint in his tired eyes. I pressed him hard, fairly and unfairly, till he could not refuse me.

"Well," he said at length, pushing back his plate—he had not eaten a mouthful—and wiping his lips with the over-acted air of a man who has made an unusually heavy meal; "well, I'll go and see—That is, I'll have a talk with my people at the factory. And if there's no serious objection, I'll come. I will really, old man."

He caught my eye. I knew whom he was going to see, and he knew that I knew.

"Well, there, hang it, old man, I can't help it. I know you mean it well. I—I can't say any more yet. I'll see you at four o'clock."

So I had to leave him to take his after-breakfast siesta.

Ten minutes later, I was talking to O'Hara, in my own quarters.

"There's the very divil in that woman, though she is as pretty as—as sin," said the Doctor. "By my soul, she's a very bad lot."

"Why, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why

do you think she's a bad lot? I don't see that she's altogether to blame."

"Nor should I if I only saw what you see, my son. But I see more. I tell ye, she's th' divil an' all of a bad lot. I know she is, because there's no deceiving her. Take it from me, if ye can't humbug a woman, she's worth avoidin'. She's not a good woman. I told her it was just for th' few days' shootin' we wanted th' boy, because, says I, he's a don with his gun. Her little shoulders touched her pink ears, an' she smiled till I swear I could smell brimstone. Faith! She'h's just the wickedest smile of any woman I ever saw. An' th' Limerick girls can smile above a bit.

"Says she, 'An' does he want to go to ze shoot?'

"'Why, of course,' says I.

"'Voilà! He will go then, n'cest pas,' says Mam'zelle. An' that was as far as I could get. But, my son, it'll take all ye know to fetch him, I'm thinkin'."

"And I'm not at all sure if it will be safe even then, Doctor, for he's looking nearer fever than fun this morning, I can tell you."

"No; I saw him at eight o'clock this morning.

He'd walk about here for a couple of days yet, and after twelve hours in Kedra's canoe he'll be a week off fever. You believe me."

At two o'clock I was in the hotel, and Rorke's Fantee hammock-bearers set him down at the bar door. His handsome face looked positively ghastly under the green lining of his Panama. But he took off his hat as he walked into the bar, and a little colour came into the dry cheeks when he greeted Mam'zelle.

"So, chere 'Orais! So you will go to ze shoot wiz your friends, n'cest pas. You will enjoy it, I hope. And for a month, ah?—or two months, eh?"

"No, no, Lisè! Who told you that? Just a few days. Little one, if you——"

Rorke leaned over to Mam'zelle. For decency's sake I had to walk across the room. I could have boxed her ears, she was so very chic. The lights which fell on her were so soft and cool; so very well arranged. I felt that O'Hara and myself, with all the big game shooting in Africa, were weak rivals—very weak. Yet it looked as though a man's life were in the balance.

At four o'clock O'Hara and myself were aboard Chief Kedra's war-canoe, which lay in the river

a mile above Prowrah. Our baggage was aboard, and so was Rorke's. He had told me almost savagely that he would come. Then he had apologised with tears in his eyes for speaking roughly. And as I walked off his verandah he had sworn at one of his boys till that Ethiopian's face turned an unpleasant purple-grey, from bodily fear.

Two of Kedra's wives were on the canoe, and before I went back to the beach with O'Hara, I was introduced to Neyula, Kedra's fourteen-year-old daughter. I had not at that time made much of a study of the Coast native, and Neyula was a revelation to me. So beautiful was this gold-skinned maiden that a man once——But that came later, and must not be told here, for this is Horace Rorke's affair.

Kedra told us that he could not start before six in the morning. The tide would not suit, he said, till then. Therefore, when all preparations were made, and we had seen comfortable quarters marked off under the great stern awning, for Rorke and ourselves, we arranged to join Kedra at six next morning, and then returned in our hammocks to Prowrah.

“ We'll freeze on to the boy this evening and

keep him busy," said O'Hara; "or maybe Mam'zelle will change what he thinks is his mind for him."

Accordingly we both dined at Rorke's place, and pretended not to notice that he ate next to nothing, and drank enough for three men. Then, because he would otherwise have gone alone, we spent an hour with him at the hotel. Mam'zelle humiliated him before his friends, and was more sparkingly fascinating than we had ever seen her, in her castigation of poor Rorke. At first he grovelled before her pretty insolence. But finally, weak as he was, his pride was touched. He found it and lost his temper.

"Good night, Mam'zelle," he said; and stalked out of the bar on legs weaker than an infant's, leaving us to follow. This we did at once. And Mam'zelle's ringing laughter—a prima donna might have envied her this, among other of her accomplishments—followed us across the deserted beach.

We saw Rorke to his bed-room, and his laugh, when he bade us "good night," resembled one of the most painful sounds one can hear. It was like a man's sob.

"Just tread on some one, on the verandah

there, will you?" he called after us. "And tell them to wake me early."

"By the powers! but we're none to soon with this cure of ours," said O'Hara, as we sat down for a night-cap in front of my quarters. "I should be sorry for the boy's chances if he had another day of this to go through. My hat, what a beautiful little devil she is! Give me a cheroot, will ye?"

I think we must have smoked in silence for half-an-hour, when O'Hara said—

"Look! Way down there by the factory! What th' devil is ut?"

I looked, and saw what seemed to me exactly like one's childish ideas of a ghost; a thing which moved without feet or wings. A figure in clinging white it was, and it flitted with a gliding motion, from Rorke's front verandah across the moonlit beach. We were looking through mystery-lending tropical moonlight, to a spot some three or four hundred yards away.

"No, she'd never dare to! And yet—Hould on, now! Watch where it goes in," whispered O'Hara.

The figure flitted on over the dead-white,

dust-covered path, towards the hotel. It reached the deep shadow cast by the hotel verandah. Suddenly then, the moon topped the ridge of the building's roof, shedding liquid silver on to the figure's head, turned landward.

"By St. Dennis it is! May the devil fly away with her! Now what the mischief has she been after, I wonder! But I fancy the boy'll keep his word though, whatever that imbodied sin's been sayin' or doin'. He thinks it's only for a couple of days or so, anyhow."

And then we turned in, O'Hara having arranged to sleep in my house.

Before five in the morning, we were tubbed and dressed, and sat smoking over our first coffee. The sun was only just beginning to draw steam from the mangroves, when we strolled down to Rorke's quarters. O'Hara used his buckskin-covered feet pretty freely among the boys on Rorke's verandah, for, by their steady snoring, it was evident that no one in the house had been roused.

"Wha' for you no wake 'um Massah Rorke, huh? Get up, bad cess to ye! Get up! Get coffee now, one time, quick—sabe?"

The boys scattered noisily in all directions; and we walked into Rorke's room. O'Hara was in front of me."

"Holy Mother of God!"

O'Hara said that, in a whisper. I felt the sound of his teeth coming together. And I felt sick. I knew exactly what had happened. I did not want to look. You can guess. And, guessing, you will know that it won't bear talking about.

He was lying with wide-open eyes which stared up at the ceiling, where the damp had peeled a long curl of blue paint off the adobe. And, curiously, there was a smile on his burnt-up lips.

O'Hara unclenched poor Rorke's purple fingers, and took from them, a little fluted green bottle. He handed that to me. I pocketed the bottle, and afterwards destroyed it—an ugly thing with its flaring scarlet label, black-lettered.

The rest was not nearly so ugly as it might seem, if put down here in black and white to be read in great, tiny England. But it was sad. It was all very sad.

O'Hara is the government in Prowrah, from

a health point of view. He is also coroner. So poor Rorke's people will always mourn him as a victim to West Africa's deadly fever. And the man who told them otherwise, would tell one of those hard, mathematical truths, which, unlike certain lies, "go down to hell on the backs of devils."

Quite the saddest woman in Africa, on the day we buried Horace Rorke, was Mam'zelle Lisè Dinan ; who broke through her engagement and sailed for France, just five days after the morning fixed for our shooting excursion with Chief Kedra.

And now, in whatsoever café chantant, or other little centre on the many-coloured Continent, you dominate those round you by the force of that witchery the exercise of which you understand so well ; I think of you, not vengefully, Mam'zelle Lisè Dinan. For I know right well, that occasionally there comes a little sob in your fluty singing, a little mist of moisture over your eyes ; those eyes which are wont to challenge all we who be men. And that this comes to you as you recall a still, hot night, on a steamy, hot beach, when you had the choice of bringing despair by a taunt, or hope

by a smile, to a foolish, clean man, whose vitality had ebbed into thin air for love of you, your witchery.

You chose the taunt? True! And he died. But there is the sob, Mam'zelle, and the mist.

DAISY TEMPEST

DAISY TEMPEST:

A COLOUR STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE

WHEN Haddon Aylmer invited me to lunch with him at the Hotel du Globo, I knew that at all events a few hours of the time I had to spend in Rio de Janeiro would be passed pleasantly. And I thought it likely that I might meet one or two nice people. When, walking down the shadowy, picture-covered corridor which led to the balcony upon which we were to lunch, I saw Mrs. Vishart, I told myself that my friend Aylmer was indeed a wonderful man; and that this guest of his was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen.

Aylmer and I were on our way home from New Zealand via the Horn and Rio, and had only twenty-four hours to spend at the latter place. Yet Aylmer lunched with the prettiest woman in the city, and the lunch we enjoyed was a poem, even for that home of artistic meals, the capital of Brazil. The brilliant colour-

ing all round us, the music in the main hall of the hotel, the shaded coolness within, and the gorgeous sunshine without; Mrs. Vishart, and the fruto salado: all were perfection. And Dr. Vishart, the husband, was such a prince of good fellows that one could not but be glad of his company. Mrs. Vishart liked the scent of the Southern cigarette; Haddon Aylmer was even more interesting than usual, and nothing occurred that should have been otherwise, until my native clumsiness made me approach a conversational quicksand from which only a Haddon Aylmer could have extricated me. We had been talking of Algiers. From that, in such surroundings as ours, to slavery, seemed an easy step, and I said something trite about racial inequalities.

"Yes," said Aylmer breezily, "but here more than anywhere one may rise above such things, and be proud to claim one's citizenship of the world, particularly the Southern world."

Blundering gaily along like a barge among yachts, I said I thought there were limits to such cosmopolitanism. Aylmer held out a deftly saving hand to me, which I complacently ignored, and added—

“For instance, one hears sometimes of white women marrying darkeys, you know—full-blooded niggers. That I really cannot understand. I cannot imagine any woman who——”

At this point, I think, even Aylmer must have felt desperate, for he trod heavily on my foot, and whispered as he bent towards me to apologise—

“For Heaven’s sake, man, talk of something else!”

Feeling then that my very existence was a mistake, I remained silent, while Aylmer’s energies were devoted to the clearing of a somewhat overcharged atmosphere. All through the evening we were moving about among different people. At length, when midnight was long past, and the brilliant city lay hushed in the calm of the early morning hours, Aylmer and myself wandered down to the market-place quay, to find a boat to take us to our ship. Though we saw plenty of small craft moored near the quay, we could find no boatmen. So, seeing that our ship was not to sail till eight o’clock, and we were therefore in no hurry, we sat down together by the side of the old water-worn quay, to smoke and talk.

"By the way," I observed, when cigarettes were lighted and we had found a soft old calabash whereon to rest our elbows; "why was my conversation so particularly undesirable at lunch to-day, Aylmer?"

Aylmer smiled in dreamy amusement as he puffed his pungent picadura smoke out towards the rippling path of moonlight which stretched across the water, from our feet to the black shadow of sleeping Corcovado.

"All's well that ends well, Amigo. But it's true your choice of a topic for discussion over the coffee, was less perfect than the coffee itself. You did not know Madame's history, did you?"

I chuckled mentally at the prospect of a yarn from Aylmer, and nodded my negative to his question.

"Well, you see, the doctor is not her first husband, though it's true she is little more than a girl now. Four years ago she was Daisy Tempest, a seventeen-year-old pupil at a select finishing-school in Brighton. At the same time Henry Maryll, a full-blooded native of Assam, West Africa, had just been called to the bar in London, and was on the eve of returning to the Coast to take up his profession as a

barrister in Accra. He was not a particularly bad-looking fellow for a darkey, but how Daisy Tempest, with her great pansy eyes and angel face——But there, one should not expect to understand the sex. One should be content to admire, and to ask no questions. Besides, you see, she was only seventeen, and lived in a boarding-school. How they first met I don't quite know, but I fancy it was in connection with a tennis party. Anyhow, I believe he was the only man present, and one must give him credit for playing his cards fairly well, for within a fortnight Daisy 'Tempest disappeared from the school. They ran away together, were married in Liverpool, and actually on their way to Africa, before Daisy's guardian—she was an orphan—knew what had become of them. The thing was done, and no steps were taken to undo it.

“Now about ten months afterwards, young Vishart, who had just taken his degree, and wanted to see a little of the world, accepted an appointment as doctor on one of the West African boats, and started for the round voyage, down the Coast, up the rivers, to Benin and Warri, and home again. When he reached Sierra Leone, a passenger who was leaving the steamer there,

remembered Daisy Tempest's affair, and gave Vishart a letter of introduction, addressed, of course, to Mrs. Maryll, the wife of the barrister."

Aylmer paused to light a fresh cigarette, and continuing then, said: "Well, when the *Monrovia*—that was the name of his steamer—arrived at Accra, Vishart called at Maryll's place on the road out to Christiansberg, expecting to find a lady of uncertain age and phenomenal plainness. The Sierra Leone man had given him no details, you know. As it happened, Maryll was out when Vishart called. After the doctor had been waiting for a few minutes in the drawing-room of the barrister's house, Daisy came floating in—a dream of lilies and wattle blossom in a cloud of muslin. Vishart had been brought a good deal into contact with natives on his way down the Coast, and when he looked at Daisy's great eyes of baby pathos—she was only eighteen, you know, and had been there ten months—he felt like kneeling in pitying worship at her feet.

"By and by Maryll came along with a legal friend—a darkey, of course—and found his wife pouring out tea for a handsome young stranger who was obviously not of the coloured

persuasion. Introductions and explanations left the atmosphere somewhat oppressive.

“You know what brutes we English are in some ways. There were only two other white women in Accra then—both official—and they had absolutely declined to recognise the child, though they met her husband at Government House. The white men would have liked to meet her, but she could not visit them, and they would not visit at Maryll’s place. And so poor little Daisy had positively not spoken to any one of her own colour, save a parson, since her arrival in Africa. This suited Maryll all over, because he was even more passionately jealous than are most men of his race under similar circumstances.

“When Maryll came into the drawing-room he gave his wife a look which made her shiver and Vishart perspire; and then, for his vanity’s sake, he began to do the agreeable to his wife’s friend, and even to show off a little for the benefit of his fellow-countryman present. Jealous as he was, he thought he must be fairly safe when he heard the doctor was only to spend three days in the port; so he put on an off-hand air of good-fellowship with the white man, and asked him to make free of the

house while his ship was at Accra. Vishart disliked the darkey from the moment he set eyes on him, and loathed him after catching a glimpse of Daisy's shiver. But yet—Well, the child's pathos was very tender, and her evident delight at meeting one of her own kind fascinated Vishart, who was only a youngster himself. He dined there that evening—four native professional men, two ladies of colour, and weight, a ponderous English menu, the thermometer at ninety-four, conversation about things 'at Home'; and beautiful Daisy—lilies and violets a-droop under gaslight—at the foot of the table. Can't you picture it, through a cloud of West African steam?"

Aylmer tossed the end of his cigarette into the glistening water, and looked up at me as he went on with his story. "Well, the situation was a dangerous one, and if Vishart was melting in pity on the first evening, he learned that pity was akin to love, on the second. And Daisy, thinking of the black darkness to come when the *Monrovia* had sailed, felt as though her poor little foolish heart would break. Perhaps you have never been in such an establishment as Maryll's at Christiansberg. I have once or

twice in the East ; but his was an exaggeration of the type. His servants were all people from his country—Assam side, you know—and had been trained from the first to see and hear everything, and to know how their white mistress spent every moment of her life.

“ One afternoon, when her husband was in the Courts, she had cried whilst talking to the Church of England minister. That night she was severely lectured by Maryll ; not as a white man lectures, you know, but with threats. He would sell her to a Mahommedan caravan ; he would put Kara juice in her tea and poison her ; he would be a fiend in various ways, so he assured her, if she did not behave herself. Poor little Daisy had shuddered and promised anything, for she had learned enough to know that such things are done on the Coast ; and she was only a child. And now the man terrified her with horrible threats about Vishart. But Daisy had suffered so in her isolation, and thought with such dread of the doctor's departure, that she was made somewhat reckless, and inclined to chance anything for a little present relief.

“ Anything that one does out of doors is done in the early morning, on the Coast, you know ;

and on the night before the day of the doctor's leaving Accra, Daisy promised to go for a drive with him next morning. It was a dangerous thing to do ; but Maryll would be in the Courts, and Daisy had begun to feel then, anyhow, that she would risk a good deal for the white man, who looked such reverence and tender pity at her. So at six next morning, when Maryll had just walked up the hill from his house to the Law Courts, Vishart drove up in one of the half-dozen vehicles that are owned in Accra—he had borrowed it, of course—and started out with the barrister's wife. Daisy had been waiting for him on the balcony, and by some odd chance no servants noticed them.

“Shortly before eight o'clock they returned, and the doctor walked into the house to have a chat with Mrs. Maryll before joining his ship. They walked upstairs to a little smoking-room conservatory, built out from the drawing-room, and overhanging the road leading up to the Court-house. Daisy Maryll was feeling very sad—too sad to be afraid. She had thought things out, however, that morning, and, child as she was, she had made up her mind as to what a good woman's duty was, and that she

meant to do. Vishart had been thinking, too, and was determined that he would not try to tempt beautiful Daisy. Though he loved her, mind you, and the thought of her husband, with his rolling eyes, made the man sick from very sympathy. This he did not mind showing her, and as the two sat there talking, and feeling strongly linked together in alien surroundings, Vishart did his best to cheer her. And neither heeded the whisperings of listening servants, or the rustling of blinds behind which black eyes were peering.

"Suddenly Daisy gave a little cry of alarm, and pointed to the open conservatory window at her side. Vishart rose to look out, and away up on the dusty, uneven road which lay baking in sunlight already of fiery intensity, surrounded by a little cloud of white dust, he saw Maryll, the barrister, flying down the hill from the Court towards his own house. In one hand the darkey clutched his well-worn wig, and in the other a bundle of documents. His barrister's gown streamed out behind him in mid-air, and his black forehead was beaded with perspiration. Even at that distance Vishart could see mad fury in the negro's staring eyes; and behind

him came running Karah, his own particular body-servant, whose spying watchfulness had always been a terror to Daisy. Vishart looked down at the trembling white girl, whose sweet face was blanched with terror. For himself he would have rather enjoyed waiting and throwing the darkey out of the window. But he did not forget the beautiful girl, and what she had to face.

“‘Please,’ she said, almost sobbing, ‘please do something! Sit over there! Be busy—oh, he is mad!’

“A brilliant idea came to Vishart, and, stooping, he picked up a broken Dutch pipe which lay on the floor. With his sailor knowledge he had promised to mend this for Maryll, so, whipping out a piece of fine twine from his pocket, he sat down hastily at the far end of the conservatory from Daisy and began furiously to splice.

“Half a minute passed, and they heard Maryll panting and gasping up the stone stairs, followed by his boy. Crash went a little table and vase in the drawing-room; and, tearing aside the portière curtains, Maryll, choking with passion, foaming at the lips, and covered with white dust, burst into the little conservatory.

“‘You——!’ And then he stopped. His wife was leaning out of one window, and, sitting at the other, the white man was whistling softly as he bent over his work of mending the bar-rister’s pipe.

“‘Ah!’ Maryll could not speak. His suspicion was not in the least allayed, but his opportunity was missing. So he turned through the portière, and, gripping Karah by the shoulders, almost shook the teeth out of his sneaking head as he hissed, ‘Go, bush rat! go and bring me wine, and——’ That was all Daisy heard. But a minute afterwards, through the division of the portière curtains, she saw something which Vishart could not see, and which sent a cold shudder all through her. Karah, the boy, held a tray on which stood three glasses filled with white wine. Into one of these glasses Daisy saw her nigger husband’s hand empty the contents of a tiny green bottle. Daisy looked imploringly at the doctor, and touching her colourless lips, shook her head meaningly as the curtains parted—quietly, this time—and Maryll entered, followed by the boy with the tray.

“‘Ah, good morning, Doctor,’ said the darkey,

with hideous effusiveness. 'I thought my friend Aldred was here. It is very hot, is it not? I want you to drink a farewell glass of wine with me. Daisy, my dear, allow me.'

"The man's thick lips were dripping with passionate excitement; but Vishart, acting indifference for Daisy's sake, saw nothing, and without even raising his eyes sat down at the little table upon which the wine salver had been laid. Maryll began a curious speech of compliment, and the white man sat toying unsuspectingly with his glass. Daisy, in despair, touched his foot, and tried to show in her eyes what she knew. Vishart entirely mistook her meaning, and nodded, poising his glass in mid-air, as Maryll wound up his little speech. With a woman's resourcefulness, Daisy jerked her pretty jewelled watch on to the floor at her husband's feet, and as the darkey of necessity stooped to pick it up, she deftly snatched Vishart's glass and pushed her husband's into the white man's hand.

"Perplexed, but of course saying nothing, Vishart stood waiting; and Daisy said to the barrister, 'Don't let us drink this now, Harry, please!' The darkey's staring eyes flashed one

look of jealous fury and surprise at her, and then, raising the glass which had been Vishart's, he said, 'Drink! of course we will, to the next happy meeting of we three!' And he laughed as only an angry African can. So the three raised their glasses, and the two men, both in ignorance of how matters stood, drained theirs.

" 'Ah!' ejaculated the barrister, with a triumphant glitter towards Vishart. 'Now!' And then he walked backwards to the portière curtains, behind which the door of the drawing-room stood open. Standing in the room beyond he closed this door to within a few inches of being shut, and then, with his big feet planted against it, he shouted—

" 'And now, my clever friend, I'll leave you to kiss my faithful wife good-bye, since you've only a minute to live! You thought, curse you, that the coloured——Ah, my God!'

" Vishart sprang forward in astonishment, as the negro stopped speaking and fell screaming on the floor. Petrified with amazement, Karah, the spying boy, stood in the rear, watching his master gasping and writhing on the carpet. Standing in the open doorway, and holding the curtains aside with one raised hand, Vishart

gazed down at the dying man in wondering perplexity. And as the barrister's limbs stiffened in rigid contortion and his gasping ceased, beautiful Daisy touched the white man's shoulder and whispered: 'Oh, he is dead! He is poisoned instead of you, and I—did it!'

"The white man was nonplussed, and looked it. Maryll was undoubtedly dead, and Vishart, turning to golden-haired Daisy, said: 'Upon my word, you know, I—I'm awfully sorry, but——'

"Daisy raised her great pansy eyes to the doctor's face. 'Are you?' she said. 'His people will kill us, you know.'

"'Ah, yes! I hadn't thought of that.' The doctor paused.

"'When does your ship go, did you say?' Her dainty head bent low over the man's arm.

"'By Jove, yes!' Vishart looked at his watch. 'She must be going now. Daisy—Daisy darling, will you come with me?'

"There was a rustle behind them. But Vishart's wits were sharpened now, and turning like lightning he gripped Karah by the shoulder as that youth was about to retire. 'If you breathe at all loudly I shall have to kill you all same this man,' said Vishart, pointing to the

dead barrister. And then, having locked the boy in the drawing-room, the man and the woman crept softly down the stone stairs and out into the glaring sunlight of the African morning.

“‘Daisy, darling, can you run?’ The notion of being left in Accra was no more pleasant to the girl than to the doctor. So with a queer little smile she gathered her draperies round her, and this strange pair of lovers started off at top speed, running down the dusty road, bare-headed, and panting in the stifling heat. At that hour the white folk were all indoors. And Daisy and the doctor never paused till they reached the beach, where the surf-boats lie, and a white man is something of a power. And——By Jove, here’s a boatman walking this way. Let’s make a bargain and get off to the ship.”

Aylmer had caught sight of a sleepy Portuguese boatman on the quay, and, having beaten him down in price, we started on our way to the steamer.

“What was the end of it?” I said, as we shot out into the moonlight.

Aylmer smiled, perhaps at the odd way in

which our movements had fitted in with his story. "Oh, they caught their ship," he said, "and as soon as they arrived at Lagos the doctor married the widow, in the English church there. It was a pure love match, and Daisy Vishart hates niggers; but——Well, you see why your choice of a topic to-day was not so good as the coffee, don't you?"

NOT MADE IN HEAVEN

NOT MADE IN HEAVEN

"On that coast are stories in ev'ry stone,
Such romances lurk in the plantain's shade :
One man goes there his worst sins to atone,
Another to hide how his fortune's made ;
And most go there to die."

—*The White Man's Grave.*

It is not good for a complete man to suppress any one of his seven senses, and set himself to live without its exercise. It is worse for him to subdue the eighth, and master of the others, and endeavour, having starved that to death, to get through his life's journey without it.

The Rev. George Cartwright was, I believe, jilted by the lady-superintendent of his Sunday school, and general Church organization right hand, in Seccombe, Berks. She afterwards married a disreputable novel-writer, and forsook the "serious" life for the giving of unregenerate suppers in a profane little St. John's Wood villa. Of her, therefore—poor, shiftless thing!—nothing further need be said.

Mr. Cartwright—young, earnest, and hard-working—thought his heart was broken, and so went out to West Africa, as a missionary. Why he should have picked upon the Coast as a comfortable place for a man with a broken heart to reside in, it would be hard to say. But men who take life intensely will do these things.

A newspaper editor in Brisbane developed the morphia habit rather badly, a short time back. He thought the thing over, and then, having written pathetic letters to his relatives, he went right away out back, with two pack-horses, a large stock of morphia, and an assortment of hypodermic syringes. He struck gold somewhere in the Nulla Nulla hills, and now he is a millionaire and a member of Legislative Council.

The Rev. George Cartwright did not strike gold, and is still on the Coast instilling Christianity into the hearts and heads of happy-go-lucky coloured persons; who are always ready to embrace whatever doctrine is propounded by the principals, or friends of the principals, of the best paying "factory" in their particular locality. It has always been

so in West Africa. And as in that part of the world nothing else varies, except the death-rate, one is fairly safe in supposing that conversion, as a practice, will to the end of time be indissolubly mixed up in the mind of the native, with palm-oil prices and the supply of Manchester goods.

However, this is in the general run of things, and one part of Mr. Cartwright's broken-hearted life is not. I was once coming up from the Oil Rivers in the old *Fernando Po*, and, as a matter of course, we made Accra a port of call. The Rev. George Cartwright had been with us from Benin River and left us at Accra, where, I believe, he was to spend several days. Some few hours after we had anchored, a gilt-laced official from Christiansberg, where the old Government House stands, came aboard with two messages from his Excellency the Acting-Governor. One was an invitation to the captain and myself to lunch at the vice-regal abode, and the other was a request that any potatoes and other vegetables which could be spared from the ship's stores, might be sent at once to Christiansberg.

The Rev. Mr. Cartwright was amongst the

guests present at that lunch ; and some one, who was going to Canary in the steamer which had brought me up from the Oil Rivers, asked him when he meant to take a trip Home.

“Can’t you manage to come up to Canary with me now ? A breath of cool wind would pull you through next hot weather at Kandamal.”

“A first-rate idea. You really ought to do it, in the interests of your people, you know.”

It was the Acting-Governor who had last spoken, and I looked round to observe the effect of his words upon the reverend gentleman whose heart had been broken in Berkshire. Poor Mr. Cartwright ! He spilled his wine, and his ordinarily pale face turned the colour of a cactus flower. He mumbled something about his time not being his own, and, with an awkward effort, turned the conversation on to the question of fever in Lagos.

Old Dr. O’Hara, the health officer, who sat next to me, unfastened the lower button of his white jacket, and chuckled as he whispered—

“Cartwright’s very much of a family man, you know, at Kandamal. It’s too bad to chaff him.”

This was news to me, who had thought of him only as the melancholy result of the Berkshire

episode. The man who had asked the question, too, had spoken in perfect good faith ; I was sure of that. What O'Hara does not know, however, about the affairs of white men on the Coast, is not worth mentioning. So, after lunch, I tackled him on the subject.

"Cartwright will never go Home unless he's embalmed after his next fever. He's too much domesticated at his place in Kandamal. You know Kandamal, of course—in Benin River?"

I nodded. Then I plied O'Hara with insidious cocktails, sunset-tinged. And he talked.

"Poor old George, you know, had all sorts of quaint notions, when he first came out, about racial equality and his African brethren. He was to devote his life entirely to the native—teach him self-respect, and that sort of thing. And of all places under heaven, he went to Monrovia. You know Monrovia, don't you? No? It's the capital of Liberia, the free negro republic. They talk with a 'down East' twang there, you know; and every second man's an honourable, or a judge. Why, I knew a man there who had four titles and only one shirt. He hadn't——"

"And so, Cartwright——?"

"Well, he landed in Monrovia, and went at first to live with the President—then a man who kept a big pig-and-poultry farm, for supplying ships, and so on. That President used the Liberian navy mainly in connection with his pigs and poultry. Our Government gave them a little gunboat, you know.

"Well, Cartwright's notion was to get a church built. He used to go paddling about the town all hours, in a black tail-coat, and a broad-brimmed black hat. The main street of Monrovia is the dry, rocky bed of a creek, you know, and in places, little streams run out of the sides and across it. There are all sorts of ragged, rainbow-coloured old tenements on the banks of this watercourse, and the rest of the place is more or less swamp.

"I can see Cartwright now, in his square-toed black shoes, picking his way among the boulders and goats and pickaninnies, in that street. Now and again he would come across some youngsters, with calabashes or jugs, sprawling about in the water, where a stream crossed the road, and splitting their little black sides with laughter. Then he would sit solemnly down on a rock and begin to talk

to those happy little beggars about their immortal souls. They would roll over each other in laughing at him, and clean forget the errands they had been sent on. Pretty soon a big black head in a gorgeous bandana would appear at one of the windows up above the creek, and laughter would freeze solid in the throats of those pickaninnies. 'Yew Agn-ees! Yew Thoma-a-s!'—you know the sort of drawl?—'Go 'long now, yew too, rascil! Go fetch dem yams! My fadder! Me gi'e yew bom-bom bimeby.'

"There would be a general scatter. Cartwright would be splashed from head to foot with muddy water. The youngsters, wearing an overworked expression, would go sprinting down the road till the next stream was reached. And that little attempt at teaching would be ended.

"However, Cartwright gave up open-air work after a bit, and took to calling on 'em. Then the trouble began, and he met Mrs. Abraham Lincoln Smith, and Mrs. Smith's family.

"The Smith crowd had a sort of store, and you had to go up a ladder to get to it. Cartwright clambered laboriously up that ladder one

morning, and found the family—clothed briefly in bandanas and their virtue, and sitting in a heap of coffee berries. There was the mother, a son, and four girls, all full-blooded natives, and all busy treading-out and sifting coffee berries.

“Well, Cartwright sat down and began to talk. By and by a tremendous swell came up the ladder and asked for ‘Miss Rachel.’ This nigger wore a dress waistcoat, and gorgeous pyjama trousers, a tall hat, and a stars and stripes tie—wonderful chaps, those Liberians!—and he ‘guessed and calc’lated,’ you know.

“Just as Cartwright, in his modesty, was making for the ladder, ‘Miss Rachel’ came in, and shook hands with the gentleman in the dress waistcoat—the Hon. Albert Edward Walker. Cartwright sat down on a cube-sugar box, and remained. This Rachel, you know, had a skin like the inside of an Avocada pear before it’s ripe enough to have streaks; and she wore more clothes than the others. Mrs. Abraham Lincoln was a Benin-River woman, you see, and had looked after the camp of a white man down there. I don’t know any details, you understand, but the man had been her first husband and the father of Rachel. He died

of fever, and she came north and married a Warri-River man in Liberia. Then, when she had had a son and four daughters, she buried her second man in Grand Bassam, and took up her abode in Monrovia. Now, Rachel was seventeen, and a girl you had to stare at. Heaven knows what sort of man her father could have been. She was superb. You must have seen that sort of thing—silky hair, great, soft black eyes; figure, a dream of lissom curves and sensuousness; and face, of an irregular type, but maddeningly beautiful. Take a queen of the Berlin or Vienna demi-monde, and paint her face with a solution of tropical sunshine; then imagine what she'd be like if she'd never worn corsets and had lived in the open; and you'll have something like a cheap copy of Rachel.

“Poor old Cartwright! I fancy, you know, he was brought up in Berkshire a good deal on the home-shelter system. His *fiancée* had rather frightened him than otherwise when she had let herself go at all. Yet he's really a magnificent chap, physically; only, he had always lived on tea and toast. He looked at Rachel, up there in that funny old coffee-loft place, and I can imagine him turning a delicate

pink. She paralysed the man, and made his eyes ache. He had never before seen femininity when it's blazingly beautiful. The full glare of the thing frightened and fascinated him. Honestly, he shivered when he mentioned her to me. I said—

“ ‘ Oh, Georgius mine, be wise in time ! ’ ”

“ But I don't think he knew in the least what I meant.

“ I am not certain, but I fancy she was sort of half engaged to the Hon. Albert Edward, then ; but her instincts, mind you, were a cut above that brilliant darkey, and her mother and sisters too. The mother, being a pure Oil-River native, had, of course, stuck to her religion, which was the same as that of the Warri-River man, her second husband. He had had half-a-dozen other wives, and had always worshipped Ju-Ju, the god of his fathers. Now, as the first husband had died when Rachel was still in the stage of being strapped on her mother's back in a country-cloth sling, she, too, had been brought up in the faith of the Oil Rivers. Cartwright was shocked at this, and at once set about converting her, and the rest of the family.

“ I warned him off two or three times, but he talked about his sacred calling, and his duty as a man—forgetting, I suppose, that he was a full-blown man, and so ought to have left that gold-skinned panther severely alone, let her faith be what it might. I met him once or twice when he was bound for the coffee-loft, and went up with him. You ought to have been there, my boy—you who want character-studies. The old woman saw exactly how the land lay, and her manœuvring was the weirdest kind of sport you ever saw. When she heard his step on the ladder she would hustle Rachel out of the room, and then sit round with the rest of her family, and pose as an interesting semi-convert who wasn't quite sure of herself.

“ Pretty soon, Cartwright would timidly ask where Mammy Smith's other daughter was; and there'd be a general simper all round, that you could have heard the other side of the town. Then Mammy would put her head through the hole at the back of the loft, and sing out, ' Yew, Rache-el! Drop dem bo-oks, now do! H's Messah Cartwright lib foh come see yew! '

“ Then Rachel, freshly fixed up, and glorious

in new country-cloth, would come curving into the room like a carpet snake, and sit down modestly at the white man's feet. I tell you, Cartwright would tremble all over, and he would nearly choke in his effort to be all the parson. By-and-by, Mammy and the rest of the crowd would edge out as quietly as they could, their eyes rolling and their great lips simpering. More than once I've got tired of it and made off down the ladder myself, hearing something like this as I left—

“‘And you do understand this that I have been trying to tell you, Rachel?’

“‘Oh yes, Mas'er Cartwright!’ This in a soft, cooing voice from the panther.

“It was the most hopeless case imaginable, and I couldn't pretend much surprise when Cartwright, with a tremendous splurge, took me into his confidence one day. The man's whole soul was wrapped up in that girl, and, of course, he meant marriage.

“‘I am afraid it will seem to you rather like taking advantage of my position to—to wean Rachel away from that Mr. Walker; but I love her, O'Hara, and I believe I am right in thinking that I might make her life fuller and more

complete ; a life—er—of greater scope for usefulness than—Mr. Walker could give her.’

“ He was considering the feelings of the Hon. Albert Edward. It was too grotesque. I told him I didn’t think he need disturb himself much on the darkey’s account. He muttered something about ‘standing on exactly the same footing,’ and then went on to other difficulties.

“ ‘You see, O’Hara, that is not the only stumbling-block. I wish it were. The fact is that though I find Rachel docile and ready to learn—she has hereditary belief in her favour, I think—yet in Mrs. Smith and her other daughters, racial instincts are so strong that I can make but little headway with Christian teaching.’

“ ‘Well, but hang it,’ I said, ‘there’s no need to convert the whole family !’ I couldn’t make out what he was driving at.

“ ‘Of course, I should like to do that,’ said Cartwright. ‘But that is not the point. The thing is that Mrs. Smith, whilst having no objection to my marrying Rachel, and marrying her in a Christian church, yet makes it a condition that I should—it is a terrible proposal—that I should also marry Rachel’s sisters. No ! please don’t laugh, O’Hara. Horrible though

the idea is to us, it is natural enough to these people, and, as part of their religious creed, demands serious consideration, however much one may deplore it. You see, Mrs. Smith's second husband had, I think, five other wives, and she thinks it would be only right for me to marry all her daughters, if I marry any. In fact, she will not give me Rachel on any other terms, though Rachel herself—er—quite sees the matter from my point of view. But the mother will not be persuaded.'

"'Oh, she won't!' I said. I was trying hard not to laugh. He took it in such deadly, stone-cold earnest. 'And do you propose to marry the family?'

"My dear O'Hara, surely you must see that as a teacher of the Protestant faith, apart from my own convictions as a private individual, I—Oh, the thing is utterly impossible; and criminal, I believe, besides!'

"Well, of course, one could say nothing to a man who felt like that. At first I told him pretty much what I thought of the whole thing, even as far as marrying Rachel herself went. Then he simply left me, with a pained look on his face, and later on I had to apologise,

In the end I saw that, between them, the Hon. Albert Edward and Mrs. Smith were making life a burden to poor old Cartwright. So I said to him one evening when we were sitting on the verandah of my place, after lights were out—in Monrovia you are not allowed lights in your house, without special permission, after ten o'clock at night—

“‘Look here, Cartwright, you’re wearing yourself to a shadow over this thing, all for the sake of a great lump of a negress who is laughing up her sleeve at you. You’ll be down with fever before you know where you are, and think of the conversions you’ll miss then! The *Malabar* calls here to-morrow, and Rawlings, the rector of the English church at Lagos, is coming out in her. Take my advice now: pack your traps and clear out down the Coast with Rawlings, on the *Malabar*.’

“No! he wouldn’t hear of it. His honour was at stake, and he loved the girl.

“‘Well, then, hang it!’ I said, ‘if you must marry the girl, take her with your other traps. Let Rawlings marry you, and then settle somewhere—a good way nearer heaven than Liberia.’

“I believe he thought I was very profane, but

he must have ruminated a good bit that night over my suggestion ; for next morning he came to me, and, after considerable preamble, asked if without violating my conscience I could help him in the matter. Conscience, you know, regarding that greasy old mammy and her brood ! Well, I told him I fancied I could patch up any injuries which might be sustained by the still small voice within me, and we began to lay our plans.

“The *Malabar* was to arrive about noon, and leave again at about four o’clock. We decided to pack Cartwright’s belongings in rough cases, to make them look like cargo, and then send them off to the ship in charge of a couple of my Kroo-boys. Then we thought Cartwright himself should go off early in the afternoon, and remain in Rawlings’ cabin till all the shore folk had left the ship. This would avoid rousing Mammy Smith’s suspicion, and would enable me in a perfectly natural way to beg a half-holiday for Rachel, and take her off to see the ship.

“The plan worked well, and I saw the Reverend George comfortably stowed away in Rawlings’ cabin. I say comfortably—he was trembling with nervousness, and implored me,

with tears in his eyes, not to do anything which went against my conscience.

“‘But, O’Hara,’ he added, ‘don’t let the ship go with me and without her; I could not bear that.’

“Half-an-hour afterwards I was in Mammy Smith’s loft.

“‘Morn’, Mammy!’

“‘Morn’, Messah ’Hara!’

“‘You lib foh let your Missy Rachel go for dem ship with me, huh? See dem peepil have holiday, huh?’

“‘Oh-yis, Messah ’Hara; foh suah she lib foh come one time, s’pose yew go take ’um.’

“Mammy was effusive, and began to think things were looking up with her when white men paid her so much attention. I verily believe she thought of me as a useful foil, with which to bring poor Cartwright to his knees.

“Presently Rachel rustled down the ladder with me, in all her holiday bravery, and I started off down that rocky old watercourse with the girl on my arm. She certainly did look very beautiful that day—a type of what the tropics can turn out—an’, och! the luscious beauty of the South.

"Of course, Rachel knew what was coming; Cartwright had seen to that. And so, under the folds of her chiripa, she carried a small bundle of personal belongings. She was sufficiently a child of Mangrove-land not to want much luggage. I had to pass Digby Farn's factory just before going through the Kroo quarter to the wharf. The three white agents were lying there on the balcony, and they nearly choked over their afternoon cocktails, laughing at me—at the doctor who had pulled every one of them through the fever more than once.

"The first man I saw when I stepped on to the *Malabar's* deck, with Rachel, was the Hon. Albert Edward Walker. He glared at me, and turning to Rachel, said—

"'Guess yew'd like t' see ovah th' frigit, Miss Rachel. Yew'll come right round with me? Do, now!'

"But she stuck to me like a little brick. And, later on, one of the Hon. Albert Edward's friends sang out for him to join them in their boat, which was starting for the shore. He wanted Rachel to go with him then. But she said she was waiting to go in my boat, and so Walker had to leave us. I waited till the

Malabar's anchor was apeak, and every one else 'for the shore' had left her. Then I called my boat-boys to the Jacob's ladder, and bid Rachel 'good-bye.'

"By the time my boys had started their 'yew aloo, ala la!' boat-song, the *Malabar* was fairly under way, and I could see Cartwright standing on the poop, and waving his soft felt hat to me with one hand, whilst Rachel had possession of his other arm. I naturally thought his affair was satisfactorily concluded, as far as I could effect it; and I only hoped that Rawlings would refuse to marry them.

"I put up with the white agents at Digby Farn's that night, and told them the whole story, after sending a messenger down to Mammy Smith's to explain that Rachel had gone off with Missah Cartwright. It was just as well that I put up with the white agents, because Mammy went round to my place and shamefully man-handled two of my servants, in the course of her search for me.

Three days later an intermediate boat came down the Coast, and stopped a couple of hours at Monrovia. After this steamer had left I heard, with some surprise, that Mammy Smith

and her four daughters had gone aboard as deck passengers, and had left the store in the hands of young Smith, the son.

“‘She’s gone to hunt up Cartwright,’ said the white men at Digby Farn’s. And I began to fear there might be something in the idea.

“Sure enough, when the next homeward-bound boat touched at Monrovia, I learned that Mammy and her progeny had landed at Kandamal only a few days after George Cartwright went ashore there with Rachel. I had a little time on my hands just then, so I made off down the Coast in the very next steamer for Kandamal, and landed there, by a fiendish stroke of luck, with a touch of fever in my blood, and my skin on fire. However, I managed to get hold of four carriers, and started inland in a hammock for a village called Anamo, where I was told that I should find Cartwright.

“I arrived at the big Ju-Ju house outside the village, just after sunset, and was sufficiently feverish then to wonder how much of what I saw might be real, and how much fancy.

“There was an enormous fire blazing in a plantain grove near the Ju-Ju house, and round this fire every man, woman, and child in the

village seemed to be dancing. It was a big bobbery—I knew that by the trimmings and frill; but what it was all about, I could not at first make out. Inside the ring of dancers was a smaller ring of Ju-Ju men, all robed in spotless white Manchester stuff, and chanting for their lives. There was no moon that evening, and the grove—all prickly pear, bananas, and plantains—being only lighted by that great mangrove fire, the scene was rather weird, I assure you. Suddenly, the Ju-Ju men fell flat on their faces, and the mad dance was stopped. The centre of the circle was exposed in this way, and as I hope for heaven, Cartwright was standing there in his black tail-coat and white choker, fanning his streaming face with his big, soft hat. Round him, in a little ring, were clinging Mammy's four girls, black and glistening, and Rachel, golden-skinned and beautiful. On the ground, a little distance from the central group, Mammy herself was squatting, crooning Ju-Ju charms to the tune of 'Hold the Fort.' You may think I'm painting, but it's bald fact, as I'm a sinner.

"The immediately subsequent proceedings had no interest for me. My little bout of fever gave

me all the trouble I had any use for, and I became unconscious. I was not really clear about things for a couple of days. And then I woke in Cartwright's bungalow at Kandamal, next to the little tin church that stands on piles near the beach. It was evening, and I was in the big ground-floor room. Near the window sat the Reverend George, with Rachel at his side. Squatting on the floor, in a row behind this couple, sat Mammy's four other daughters. And they wore the head-gear of married women.

"Now, perhaps you can guess why it wouldn't be very easy for our friend George to go Home. Of course, it's given out that Rachel's four sisters just keep house at Kandamal, and save Cartwright and Rachel servants' wages. And, as a matter of fact, that's literally true. But all the same, on the evening of my arrival in that hammock, at Anamo, the Rev. George Cartwright had been forced to choose between losing Rachel—she would have gone back with Mammy Smith and the others—and marrying the four sisters in the church of Ju-Ju.

"He chose the latter alternative; and I was the only white man in Africa who witnessed the ceremony."

THE EDUCATION OF A
RIVER GIRL

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THE EDUCATION OF A RIVER GIRL

"No—'tis ungainly work, the ruling men, at best !
The graceful instinct's right : 'tis women stand confessed
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
Takes nothing and gives all :

."

—*Fifine at the Fair.*

"WELL, of course, I say nothing about the women," remarked the harbour-master's young friend, as he allowed the cognac to trickle from his liqueur-glass into his coffee-cup. "They are always women, and a man may forget the rest." The young man spoke somewhat stridently, and the harbour-master fidgeted impatiently in his chair ; while their host looked straight down his nose, and thence to the edge of the creeper-shaded verandah. "One thinks of them as women rather than as niggers ; and women have no race, nor rank, to my thinking."

"H'm'm !" interjected the harbour-master,

with a throat-note containing sufficient warning to have made a coast steamer sheer off from the Sierra Leone river mouth.

"But the men"—continued the young man, blandly sipping his cognac-ruined coffee, or coffee-ruined cognac. "Well, you know, I think a man's a fool to consider anything more than the purely physical comfort of a nigger. To credit them with any finer emotional or intellectual sensibilities is, I fancy——"

"Hush!" whispered the harbour-master, "here's the boy with cigars."

A fine specimen of six-foot tall West African semi-savagedom handed round cigars, and retired then, discreetly. Dr. Fitzgerald, the host, waited with courteous patience for further words of wisdom from his guest, the young friend of his old friend. He had not long to wait.

"Look at that fellow, now, the boy who brought the smokes. An excellent servant I've no doubt, Doctor, or he wouldn't be in your house. But to suppose that a bullet-headed, thick-lipped——"

Here the harbour-master, with steady, inexorable hand, upset his coffee over the young man's patent shoes, and with his apology turned the

conversation, as the course of a steam-roller might be changed by the turning of a crank.

The ordinary new-comer to the Coast has clean, pretty, silly notions about racial equality, and the unimportance of the cuticle in its relations to a man's possibilities. The harbour-master's young friend was far beyond all this, before he reached the Coast, he being a travelled man. "You see I know the East fairly well, and one learns the native there," he would say. And, indeed, he had spent a day or so in most of the P. & O. steamers' stopping-places. Then, too, he was the nephew of a member of Parliament, and in many ways a man who knew.

"Look here, my son," said the grey-headed harbour-master, when the two were wending their way in tropical moonlight from Dr. Fitzgerald's house to their own quarters. "You mustn't air your racial theories so promiscuously. You really mustn't. They may be all right, you know; but every one don't share 'em. This Coast of ours is a queer place. The doctor don't share them; and that boy of his, whose head and lips you took exception to, is rather a pet subject of his."

"Oh, well, of course, if—I'm very sorry, you

know; but a man can't be expected to guess that a man has chums among his nigger servants, you know. I mean t'say—well——”

“See here, Sonny,” said the older man, as they reached the verandah of his quarters, and sat down there in lounge-chairs. “This Coast is not like any other place on God's earth. It's too near to Hades, for one thing. Only a mangrove swamp between 'em, you know. There's three sorts of white folk here, and we're none of us too white. There's men here for the Government. Perhaps they're the best. There's men here to make money, in the name of Christianity and the mission stations. And there's men here to make money, anyhow and anywhere that business's to be done. And they're not the worst. Well, then, there's three sorts of coloured folk. There's the men who, as sons of chiefs or well-to-do 'marchands,' have been educated in England. They're mostly clever rogues. There's men who've been brought up in the odour of 'pork and beans and the gospel' at the mission schools. They're stupid rogues. And there's your genuine West-Coast man, or Oil-River savage—beads, gas-pipe-barrelled gun, and all—who, if he speaks white man's talk at all,

speaks pidgeon English with more pidgeon than English. And if he's a rogue, he's generally a devilish white rogue, though he has a skin tar would make a light patch on."

"Yes! Just so," assented the young man; "but I don't quite see how——"

"No! Well, hand me one of those cheroots, and give me a chance to tell you. You're making quite a sort of walking guide to knowledge of me."

The young man sniffed slightly over the first whiff of the green cheroot which the harbour-master had given him. But the older man did not notice the sniff, and yawed loosely on, in his good-humoured, drawling way.

"When Dr. Fitzgerald first came to the Coast—that was several years ago, you know—he went down to Warri River, below Benin, you know; to take up the practice of a man called Yeats. Well, this Yeats was a decent sort of chap, but a little mad on everything to do with natives, and native ceremonies, and—things. Fitzgerald took over Yeats' quarters and servants, with the practice. Now, a couple of years before this time, Yeats had come very near getting his head knocked off, in a quarrel with Ju-Ju men over some trouble about a girl.

This was in a village inland from Warri, and the trouble was about the girl's being submitted to the poison test in a charge of immorality, or sacrificed, or something. Anyhow, Yeats had got her safely out of it; and, for a wonder, no harm came of his meddling that time—at least, no harm that one could see. But the girl, Meyreela was her name, got into the habit of coming down to Warri to stay with Yeats' headman and his wife. She'd stay sometimes two or three months on a visit, and the doctor used to yarn with her, evenings, on the verandah.

"Perhaps you've heard what an Oil-River beach is like—six houses on piles, and a dozen native huts, you know. She was a curious girl, this Meyreela, and, of course, knowing a white man, made her more curious. They're not all ugly, down the rivers, you know, especially when they're young. Yeats took a good bit of interest in the girl; and, half knowingly, and half because he couldn't help it, he taught Meyreela more than it's good for a native girl to learn—perhaps. Well, then he went home invalided, and Fitzgerald took over his concern, including, though he didn't know it, a kind of mortgage on Meyreela.

“By-and-by, when Fitzgerald had had perhaps a month of Warri-beach solitude, he strolled on to his verandah one day and found, sitting there like a statue in old bronze, the most beautiful girl in the Oil Rivers. Then his head-man came out, and there were introductions. Time passed, and the bronze statue remained, the one ornamental feature of the doctor's quarters. Then Fitzgerald took up the native interest fad. He was rather an impracticable, idealising sort of chap at the best of times, Fitzgerald; and he went into the native business more thoroughly than Yeats had ever done. He not only taught Meyreela to put the metaphorical, flowery dialect of her country-side into English words—not pidgeon English, you know;—but he even learned a good deal of her own, and other vernaculars, himself. He also took to occasionally donning native finery, and attending native ceremonies of the milder kind; Ju-Ju palavers, and things. And he became a deuced popular man in Calabar, and among the chiefs out back from Warri. We dearly love a lord, no matter what kind. They're ready to worship a white man who takes them seriously.

"Now in Meyreela's native village—Tinibar—there was a young fellow called Keora who was just as white as a nigger could be. He wasn't a chief, or a little tin divinity of any sort; but he was a sharp fellow, and he owned three canoes, and every season sent the Lord knows how many barrels of palm-oil to the factories in Warri. A smart man, a decent man, and a successful man was Keora. But he had his one weakness, as men do, you know. Keora's weakness was Meyreela, and he had it badly. Perhaps Meyreela didn't know it; and perhaps she did. I don't know that colour makes much difference in their knowingness. Then, too, the other village girls would let her know it mighty quick. And, anyhow, before that tattooing business, or whatever it was Yeats got her out of, she'd been spoken of as Keora's wife that was to be—his first, too, by the way—and envied accordingly. True, her fanatic mother would rather have made a Ju-Ju sacrifice of her, or something of that sort. But neither girl nor mother have very much say where an Oil-River man's courtship's concerned; and but for the change that Yeats brought in her life, Meyreela would probably

have married Keora in a few months, without a murmur, and with a big flourish of tom-toms. There was no earthly reason why she shouldn't have. But she didn't, because of the Yeats intervention. Though Yeats thought a heap of Keora, and told the girl so more than once.

"It wasn't that Meyreela was in love with Yeats as a personality and a man. But there was the white man's atmosphere, the white man's teaching, the glimpse into another world; and——Well, perhaps the doctor was caviare, and Keora, with his strength and his weakness, was——er——the Yorkshire pudding. As I said, she was a curious girl.

"Well, now, Fitzgerald, it's true, was a different personality. The girl hadn't been in love with a personality. Fitzgerald was the same world. He brought the caviare atmosphere, because he couldn't help it. In a sense the girl showed Fitzgerald a new world. That's what made him take up the native fad. But he was more humane, more a personal man than Yeats had been, anyhow. She was not by any means a mere atmosphere to Fitzgerald, but a warm, soft, beautiful, purring life

that crept into his Warri-beach solitude, and—made it hum. And I reckon he was not for very long an impersonal thing in the life of that warm bronze statue. Keora didn't think so, anyhow. And Keora probably knew.

"But Fitzgerald, mind you, was a straight, clean man, even then—fancifully so, according to the creed of the average man on the Coast. You know the bulk of men out here, and more particularly in the rivers, take unto themselves a native wife every now and again, just as they take a new head-man, or a boat-boy. Fitzgerald was fancifully straight, I say, in such matters, but—Well, you don't know the solitude of an Oil-River beach. His principles were quite different to those of the ordinary man out here. But he was a dreamy, idealising sort of chap, as I said before; and—It comes to much the same thing in the end, though I daresay it's entered down in a different ledger up above. It ought to be, any way.

"If the girl had had a decent mother instead of a howling Ju-Ju fanatic, it might have been different. As it was, if there hadn't been a white man, or any other sort of man, in Warri,

the girl would rather have been there than in her own village, for the sake of peace, and to avoid her mother. But there was a white man, and a good deal else beside. And so Meyreela nominally lived with the doctor's head-man and his wife, and practically lived with Fitzgerald on the verandah, when Fitzgerald was idle, and with her imagination—a fairly lively one—when Fitzgerald was busy.

“And Keora, the strong man with the weakness, wasted a good deal of time, and palm-oil, and other more or less valuable things, loafing about Warri beach; when, according to every known rule of commerce, he should have been up inland attending to his interests. Meyreela didn't actually dislike the man of her own race—she had ceased now to dislike anything, unless, Fitzgerald's absence—but she was growing to regard Keora as a sort of negative nuisance, because of that particular part of his wastefulness which involved hours spent in the vicinity of Fitzgerald's quarters, or worse still, on Fitzgerald's verandah.

“Then, one night, the moon rose at an inopportune moment, like the face of a chaperone in the doorway of a conservatory. Keora was

walking up from the beach for his nightly prow—
—a very loving, watchful prow—round the
house which sheltered his weakness. As I said,
the moon rose. Keora, by its inopportune aid,
saw the doctor lean over, and kiss, Meyreela.
He even saw the caress returned, and heard
the little purr with which it was accepted.
Then Keora knew that he was in a very bad
way. He realised just how much of his life was
his weakness. So he turned and went quietly
back to his canoe. And that night, there was no
man on the Coast who was quite so sick as Keora.

“True, he was a nigger. Anyhow, he ceased
then, from that time, to be even a negative
nuisance to the guest of Fitzgerald’s head-
man. And Meyreela, a very happy, loving
little panther, ceased probably to be aware of
this sick man’s existence.

“Then a message came by cable for Dr. Fitz-
gerald, and he went home by the first steamer,
to the death-bed of his mother. So Meyreela
was left alone in all Africa. I speak of it as I
think she must have felt it.

“A new doctor arrived less than a fortnight
after Fitzgerald’s departure. People have to
do without most things on the Coast; but the

doctor is a necessary adjunct, you know—if anything, more essential than the cocktail. You might think, perhaps, that Meyreela could have gone on absorbing doctors like breadfruit, or anything else that came along. But she couldn't. The departure of Fitzgerald, and the arrival in his place of old O'Hara, a seasoned Coast medico, was a slightly different matter to the arrival of Fitzgerald as the successor of the man who had been to her, impersonal, an atmosphere. Then, too, there had been—happenings. Meyreela stared with lack-lustre, sorrowful, black eyes at the new doctor, from the back verandah of the house which was now his. The child's little body, and isolated, tender mind, was aweary with a burden of sorrow and loneliness, all too heavy for her weakness.

"O'Hara looked at her, laughed, and, in his genial way, said to the head-man: 'So this girl she belong for Massah Fitzgerald, no be so?' The head-man nodded and grinned, as a head-man will; and O'Hara added: 'Well, of course, you sabe, 'dis girl can stop for this place so long's she please—Huh!'"

"So Meyreela stayed, all places being one to her just then, her only preference, if she had

one, being for a place where her ranting mother was not. Keora, hearing of these things, became more wasteful than ever before, in such trifles as time. His affairs he neglected with conscientious completeness. And his hovering watchfully round the doctor's quarters, ever on the look-out for the slightest opportunity of being of service to Meyreela; this was a very pretty thing to see, and sad, too, as things go, but worth any woman's acceptance.

"Then the 'wheel and the drift of things,' in the time of Meyreela's sadness, became crucial. The girl was forced into returning to her native village, where dwelt the fanatic, her mother, and the fanatic's favourite Ju-Ju men. And she didn't go now as beautiful Meyreela, the wife of Keora that was to be; Meyreela whose goodness disarmed envy. She went of necessity, and in a mist of shame and suspicion. A suspect to be watched. Possibly, as events might prove, a life to be forfeited. What? My dear fellow, there are no more moral people—as regards the observance of the eleventh commandment, anyhow—outside Suburbia, than your Oil-River West Africans. And, there being no newspapers in native West Africa, where Church

rules State, its morality is a more fearsome thing, more savage, than is even Suburbia's.

"Keora, with his big heart, his black skin, and his time-wasting proclivities, suggested, with his own delicacy, a very simple solution of the whole difficulty. He suggested that his weakness should become his wife, and in the shadow of his prestige, snap her fingers, even when the time of trouble came, at all the fanatics in Africa. Meyreela sighed tearfully through the mist of her sadness; and with all a woman's loyalty, if only to a memory, declined. Eh? Yes, there are times—one notices it afterwards—when Yorkshire pudding is a safer, wiser diet than caviare.

"Keora might have shrugged his shoulders—his naked, coaly shoulders. But he didn't. He went instead to Warri beach, and called on O'Hara. From that veteran he learned that Dr. Fitzgerald had accepted the post of resident medical officer in Sierra Leone, and was then on his way out from the old country. Then Keora felt that something must be done. Meyreela's situation demanded it, and who should do the something if not he, Keora, who loved her? So Keora walked out from O'Hara's quarters into the sun-

shine, and lay down in his canoe under the shade of the overhanging mangrove branches, to think.

“‘Now,’ thought Keora, ‘I am in a worse way than when I saw him kiss her; for then my only trouble was that he should be in that place and not I, Keora. Now, I am troubled because I cannot be in that place, and, again, because Meyreela has no one, not any man, to take it. Yes,’ he thought, ‘I am now very sick.’ And then he roused himself and called himself a black thief, for lying there in the shade and doing nothing.

“But there wasn’t much blackness about him, poor devil, unless you count his one weakness as black. No man knew better than he did, what happens to an Oil-River girl in Meyreela’s position, when the climax of her trouble comes. The Oil-River fanatic says grimly, ‘In the end, all loves, all hates, all wars, to Ju-Ju; therefore, haste not.’ And Keora also knew that, even without the event which would make the girl’s life legally forfeit to the Church, Meyreela’s mother desired nothing more than to offer her daughter as a sacrifice to Ju-Ju. Eh? The missionaries? Why, Sonny, the missionaries have nothing to do with native life, its rites

and ceremonies, a dozen miles away from the white men's beaches.

"Well, as soon as Keora had thought matters out a bit, lying there under the mangrove branches, he just walked straight up to Witt and Busch's factory, and asked when the next boat left for Sierra Leone. By an odd stroke of luck, there was a boat due to call at Warri on her way up the Coast, in two days from that time. Then Keora asked Witt & Busch's agent how much, in money instead of in ornaments and Manchester stuff, he would give for Keora's three canoes and all the palm-oil he could get that season. The agent's weather-eye lifted, and he offered a pound more than a return native fare to Sierra Leone. Keora closed with child-like readiness, and made the best of his way up-stream to his village, Meyreela's village. Arrived there, however, he decided not to tell her of his errand, lest he might fail in it. So he just told her, in Warri-side dialect, to keep her heart up, and that he'd soon be back. Then he solemnly charged his people with the girl's protection, and himself hurried back to the beach and caught the Sierra Leone boat—he who'd never before been fifty miles from the Warri River.

"On the third evening after Dr. Fitzgerald had settled down in his Sierra Leone quarters, Keora walked in, with the coffee as it were, after dinner. Fitzgerald flushed in the darkness, there on the verandah—just where we sat to-night—when he recognised the man who in the old days had hung about his Warri-beach quarters. Keora's black face reminded the doctor of many things—of the bronze statue, the little, purring, loving panther of the Warri phase. Keora's delicacy, or stupidity, or something, made him diffident. He only said that Meyreela was sad—'make plenty trubbil'—without her white master. He stammered over 'master.' It was a nasty pill, you know, loving her as Keora did, even for a—for a nigger, eh?

"Well, the doctor said he was sorry, and that sort of thing; and added something about the necessity of parting, even among the best friends. Then Keora let himself go. Went down on his knees, there on the verandah where we sat, and—and made a damfool of himself, you know. Cried, and—"She go die, foh suah,' he said, 'spose yew no go foh dem place, sah! She die one time, 'spose she no be sackreefice foh Ju-Ju. Das' my country fash' (fashion,

you know), and a whole heap more, he said. And in the end he managed to open Fitzgerald's eyes to just about one-half of what his idealising, native fad business was going to mean. So Fitzgerald just told his assistant in Sierra Leone to take a brace, and do the best he could, as resident medical officer. Then the two white men, or the white man and the nigger, however you like to put it, went aboard a South Coast boat, and started for the river.

"As they went down the Coast, the doctor's old feeling for the little panther girl with the big, loving eyes, began to grow over him again, getting stronger with every port the steamer touched at. By the time they got to Benin River, the man was in a perfect sweat of nervous anxiety, and spent all his time in repeating questions of minute detail to Keora. Keora was about as good as they make—niggers, anyhow, you know; but he couldn't do very much to help Fitzgerald. He had all the sickness himself that one man could make any use of, seeing that whatever happened he stood to lose. His position may have been ahead of the doctor's, really—I should bet that way myself—but Keora didn't see it in that light. He had his one weakness.

"Well, at last they dropped anchor off Warri beach, and Keora and Fitzgerald stole the biggest canoe in the place, and pressed every one into their service, for the trip up-river to Meyreela's village. Fitzgerald was drinking quinine and iron like—like whisky; but he was in a cold sweat, and pretty near low fever, when they sighted the village. Just as they were drawing into the beach, they heard a booming of horns and tom-toms. Half a minute later, Chief Jadah's war-canoe, and half a dozen other craft, shot round the bend above the beach, and came dashing along to the tune of a two-hundred-man-power boat-chant.

"'What the devil's all the fuss about?' spluttered Fitzgerald, trembling all over with nervous excitement, and addressing a crooning old hag who sat on the beach.

"The old woman raised her head. Keora said three quick words in the vernacular. The old woman replied with two words and a howl. And just then Chief Jadah's great canoe shot in beside Fitzgerald's.

"The white man asked no more questions. He felt the reason of Keora's throwing himself on the sand and beating his head, native fashion.

“Amongst the Ju-Ju men in Jadah’s canoe stood a thin, shrivelled old woman in a scarlet robe. She was pointing with one shrivelled hand at Fitzgerald, and cackling like a hyena. This was Meyreela’s mother. Fitzgerald had met her before. The only words the doctor heard were ‘sackreefice p’laver.’ But he knew enough to understand that, with the other signs. He had arrived some three hours too late. That’s what made the old scarlet-robed abortion laugh.

“In England, that old hag would frighten little children with tales of lakes of burning fire. In West Africa she was able to go further; and it pleased her—she would have called it the finger of Ju-Ju, his vengeance—that the white man should arrive a couple of hours after poor little, trembling Meyreela had reached the bottom of Warri creek, a river sacrifice to a tigerish deity. But even then, Fitzgerald didn’t understand one-half the horror of the thing. He didn’t know that when Meyreela had been led out, flower-bedecked, to the sacrifice, that in her case it was no gift-sacrifice, but the Church’s forfeit; Meyreela’s punishment for his—Ah, well! he learned it later. Learned there had been a little crowing thing of life in her arms. That,

when she had been thrust under the yellow current of that muddy creek, two lives had been taken instead of one. He learned later; and perhaps that was the bitterest part of it all."

"But, good God!" began the younger man.

"Yes, I know," said the harbour-master, rising from his chair. "Of course, Fitzgerald appealed to the Commissioner in Benin, and that sort of thing. But, my boy, the authorities are fairly wise. They know that interference beyond certain limits, outside the white men's centres, simply means everlasting skirmishing. After all, it's their religion, and—not so very unlike the early phases of ours; eh? Anyhow, I only told you all this because——"

"Yes; I see—I see," said the young man.

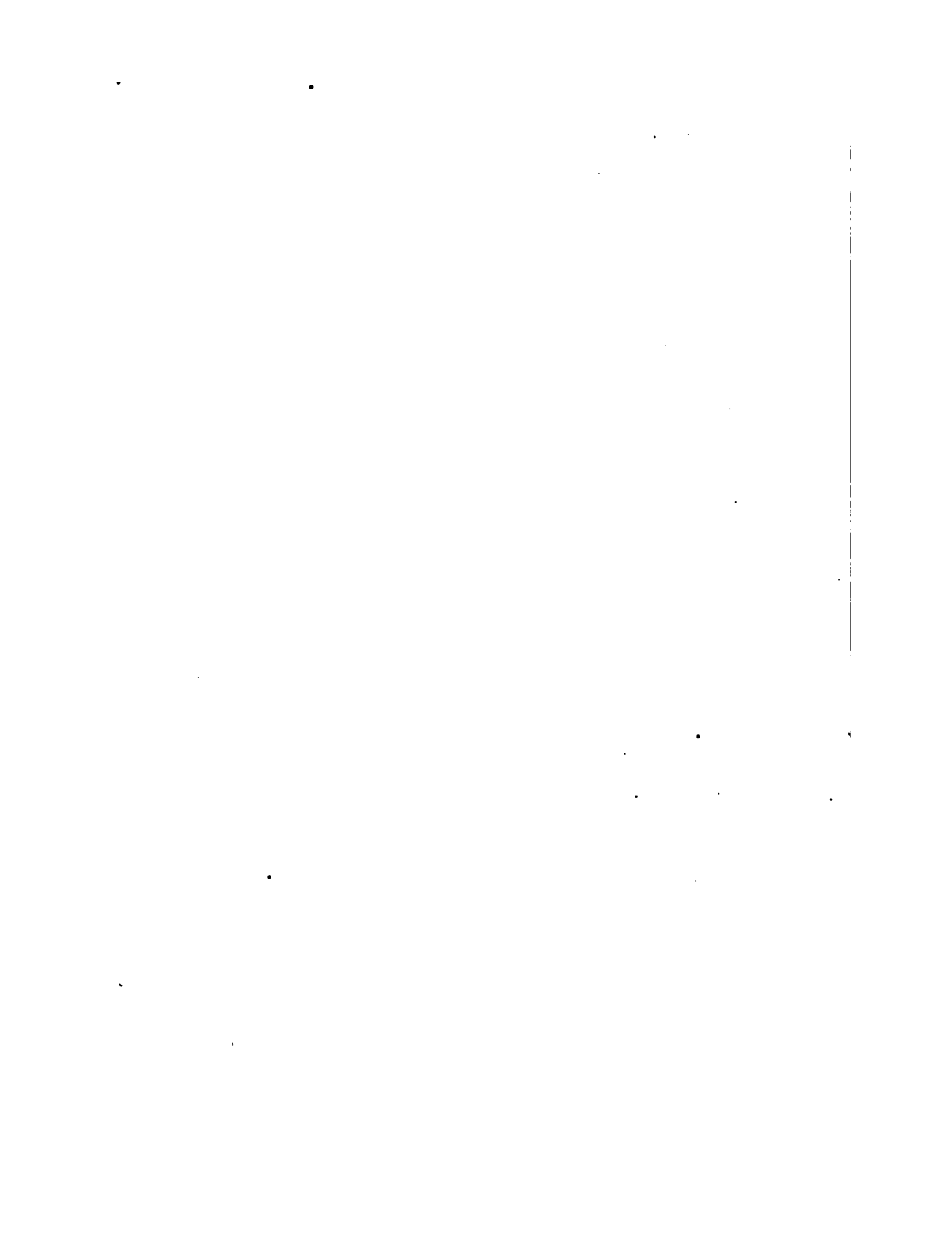
"Exactly. Well, and Keora's never left the doctor since. He's been Home with Fitzgerald twice. He was the bullet-headed chap who brought the cigars in."

"Good Lord! By Jove! I say——"

"Oh, it's all right, Sonny! I'm going to turn in. Good-night!"

So the harbour-master threw away his cheroot-end, and went to bed.

THE CONVERSION OF
CHIEF ABEOKUTA



THE CONVERSION OF CHIEF ABEOKUTA

"I du believe it's wise and good
To sen' out furrin missions—
Thet is, on sartin onderstood
An' ortherdox conditions ;
I mean nine thousan' dols. per ann.,
An' me to recommend a man
The place'ould jest about fit.

"I du believe in bein' this
Or thet, ez it may happen,
One way or t'other hendiest is
To ketch the people nappin'.
It ain't by princerples nor men
My prudent course is steadied ;
I scent wich pays the best, an' then
Go into it bald-headed."

—*The Pious Editor's Creed.*

IN a certain small settlement not very far from the Forcados bar, two otherwise godly men are thirsting for each other's gore. The Wesleyan minister has never spoken to the incumbent of the Church of England, in that town, since Chief Abeokuta married the half-caste girl from Cape Coast Castle ; and both have placed on record

several bitter sermons, dealing trenchantly with each other's little failings, and causing the coloured portion of their respective congregations to grin, audibly and with much gusto.

The white men at the settlement—there are very few, and their lives are deadly monotonous—enjoyed the fun, too, while it lasted. I am inclined to think the Rev. Bulstrode James, of the Established Church, rather liked it. But there was no doubt that his reverend friend, Mr. Park, of the other denomination, took the matter very much to heart.

Mr. Park was young, and new to West Africa. He had all the wonderful enthusiasm which distinguishes men who have not had their first bout of fever, and who still cherish the beliefs of their college days in the matter of the cultivation and reformation of their "cull'd bred'ren." One of the first men he tackled after his arrival at the settlement, was a wealthy and powerful chief named Abeokuta.

Now, Abeokuta had more slaves than he could count, and his trade with the Coast in palm-oil was immense. He had corals and pearls worth a king's ransom, a costly taste in champagne and machine guns, and a fine disregard for every one's

convenience but his own. He had never pretended to become converted to any white man's religious doctrines, and cared very little about even Ju-Ju, the god of his own people. However, the Rev. Edward Park "allowed," as the American missionary put it, that he would convert Daddy Abeokuta to the faith of John Wesley. It was the one humorous thing in life at the settlement to watch him in the process.

As is customary amongst very new arrivals on the Coast, the Wesleyan clergyman took his breakfast at eight or nine o'clock in the morning, instead of at half-past eleven; and he thought nothing of walking about in the sun from nine till noon, or later. The white men at the big factory used to pull their lounge-chairs up to the balcony-rail at about nine or half-past, and watch Mr. Park instructing the guileless Abeokuta in the way he should go.

Chief Abeokuta, when he was staying in the settlement, was a man who went to bed very late, and was scrupulous in the matter of being thoroughly drunk before finally retiring for the night. This was a weakness of his, for which he accounted to Mr. Park by saying: "Long time

me always bin drunk in de ni'time. My fadder, 'e be all same same, an' s'pose me no be drunk, den me no get sleep no mor' nuffin."

One would have thought that a clear and logical argument like this would have convinced the most rabid prohibitionst. But it was not so with the Wesleyan minister. He tried to reason with the chief, even on this point.

When Abeokuta woke in the morning at about eight or nine o'clock, he would wander flabbily on to the verandah of a native trader's house, and settle down with a couple of bottles of dry Monopole. He would lie there, stretching and yawning over his champagne, till eleven or twelve o'clock; and it was during this period that the work of his conversion was proceeded with. When the minister walked briskly up to the verandah out of the glaring sun, and saluted Abeokuta as though he were speaking to a parishioner in an English village; the chief would always bob his woolly head, and invite his visitor to drink Monopole from the broken neck of a gilt-topped bottle. This was how the fun used to begin, and the men at the big factory roared regularly at this pantomime, though they witnessed it every day.

The native chief liked to have the white man's parson pay him regular visits and talk earnestly to him. He took it as a tribute to his state, and was grateful, though after the first half-hour he did yawn pretty frequently as he stretched his great black limbs on the boards. He made some rather good remarks, too, at different times, in talking to the Rev. Edward Park. On one particularly hot morning the parson found him very muddled before ten o'clock. He had been sitting by the bedside of one of his brothers, who had died before sunrise. Mr. Park remonstrated plaintively with him, for drinking on so sad and solemn an occasion, when his brother lay dead a few yards away.

Abeokuta took a long pull at his bottle, and then said: "Yew Park!"—the West African, of any standing, scorns the "Mister" of civilisation—"Yew talka me plenty time that de man who b'leeve foh yoh Ju-Ju 'e go 'evin'" (heaven) "for suah! No be so?" The clergyman nodded. "Well, my brudder, 'e b'leeve foh yoh Ju-Ju, an' 'e be good man; so e' mus' go 'evin'. No be so? Now, yew say 'evin' 'e be fine place—all man 'e go dere 'e be happy. So what foh yew be sorry?

What foh yew be veckis" (vexed) "cos my brudder 'e die? Yew white man, yew be foolish like I dunno what! Yew no get sense! Yew say when good man 'e go die 'e be happy; den yew say 'nudder man mus' be veckis, an' no drink 'cos his good brudder die! What foh yew no be glad, eh?"

Mr. Park's replies to this and many other questions were not placed on record. But his conversation must have made some impression on the mind of Abeokuta, for, after a few weeks, it was announced that that respected chief had become converted, and was to be received in the bosom of the Wesleyan Church. The good Mr. Park was jubilant, and wrote fully to Exeter Hall authorities of this, his first and important conversion. Here was a splendid example to throw at the heads of the old hands on the Coast, who mildly ridiculed his enthusiasm!

Sure enough, when the first Sunday after his conversion came round, Abeokuta marched into the little Wesleyan church with a retinue of followers that nearly filled the place. It is true he rather disconcerted the congregation by knocking the top off a champagne bottle during

the long prayer. But his inexperience was considered sufficient excuse for this.

Two or three days afterwards the chief went away on a trip to his own territory, and induced the clergyman to accompany him. As soon as his large feet were firmly planted on his native scrub, he informed the clergyman that he wished to marry, according to the rites of the Wesleyan Church, a young half-caste girl named Mara, who was looked upon as being the beauty of the district. Mr. Park gently pointed out that, as Abeokuta was then the proud possessor of twenty-three wives, the prejudices of the Wesleyan denomination would make it rather hard for him to be united in the holy bonds with yet another maiden.

The chief passed over this trifling objection with lofty indifference, and said, "Dat be all same same, Park! Dis girl, she be bes' past all dem udder wimmin! Me no care foh dem no moh 'n nuffin'!"

Mr. Park quietly but firmly persisted that, as a representative of the Wesleyan Church, he could not perform the ceremony for a man who was already so numerously married as Abeokuta. Then the clergyman had a glimpse of the real

native as he was, and is. The chief said : "Yew, Park, yew sabe dis ! Me be chief here ; yew be Ju-Ju man—parson—d'as all same same. Me go foh marry dem girl in de Wesl'in Church. S'pose yew make um plover, all right ! S'pose no make um plover, me t'ink um better yew go' way quick, case some man 'e go kill-l yew ! Sabe ?"

The end of it was, that Abeokuta got into a towering passion at the parson's obduracy in refusing the rites of the Church in the matter of this twenty-fourth bride. And Mr. Park had to return to the settlement rather hurriedly.

Three days afterwards, Abeokuta marched in with a tribe of slaves and supporters, and, calling on the Rev. Bulstrode James, expressed an earnest desire to become a member of the Established Church. The Rev. Bulstrode smiled, and received the convert from a dissenting body, with open arms.

A week later, it was announced, much to the horror of the Wesleyan section, that arrangements had been made for the celebration in the English Church of the settlement of a marriage between Chief Abeokuta and Mara, the half-caste girl. Mr. Park openly expressed his indigna-

tion against the Rev. Bulstrode James. But when the day of the marriage arrived the little church was crowded, and all the white residents turned out to witness the binding together in matrimony of Abeokuta and the beautiful half-caste. Several white men signed the register; and at a very swell breakfast given by the bridegroom after the ceremony, M'Laren, the English doctor, said—

“How did you manage about those other wives of yours, Abe, old boy? Did you get an all-round divorce?”

The chief grinned till he had exposed quite a valuable consignment of ivory, and replied—

“Ho! me sabe dat palaver plover! Me sell um sevinteen to me brudder, an' sis” (six) “to me son, an' make plenty money so, cos dey be fine wim-min!”

And this is really the reason of the coldness still existing between the reverend pastors of the Wesleyan and the Established Churches, in that settlement.

**AB SHEYBÁN AND THE
PARTNERS**

AB SHEYBÁN AND THE PARTNERS

“‘And what, pray, is a Beachcomber?’ asked the large, smooth man who carried a gold pince-nez.

“‘A Beachcomber is a man who lives on one or several of the world’s Beaches,’ answered he of the shaggy beard—‘the outside places.’

“‘Oh, indeed—the outside places? Outside what, pray?’

“‘Your comprehension,’ replied the Beachcomber shortly, as he turned away.”—*Surf and Sin*.

I WAS on the sick list from a low fever picked up in Benin, when last I went South from Marseilles in a Messageries Maritime boat. And so, for a while, I missed the good time which usually comes to me everywhere south-east of the Levant. On the afternoon during which we were to leave Port Louis, Mauritius, I came on deck for the first time for a week, and sat watching the coolies taking in cargo. By-and-by, a little craft, with a slate-coloured hull and a huge crimson sail, came careering alongside us from the shore, and hitched on to a deck port under our lee rail. I could see the legs

of a white man, and one of his hands, in the stern of the cutter, but the rest of him was hidden by the folds of the lateen sail.

I appealed to a friendly shore-clerk for information, and was told that an Englishman had come out in the little boat, to supervise the loading of some coral he was sending by us to friends in Australia. Some instinct led me to go forward and have a look at the Englishman. Naturally enough, since I had last seen him eight months before, between Benin river and Benin city, West Africa; I found that Britisher to be Haddon Aylmer.

"Hullo, old chap! you here?" was his matter-of-fact salutation when he saw me.

Then, turning to a coolie, he swore gently, and pointed out that coral required slightly gentler handling than coal. I have long given up being surprised at meeting Aylmer anywhere, and nothing short of the happening of the expected would startle him. In the end, I weakly arranged to make the rest of my voyage in a later boat, and went ashore with Aylmer. He demoralises me utterly, but I like the process.

Haddon Aylmer was living in the quaintly overhanging upper half of a house near the

Citadel, the ground floor of which was a bazaar, where one bought sardines, thin blue wine, and bed-linen. This was superintended by an aged, grizzled Creole, his pretty grand-daughter, and a blaspheming parrot.

We dined together in a room overlooking the base of Peter Botte; and our dinner was a poem of picturesque incongruity, beginning with a fruit salad, interspersed with cigarettes and olives, hingeing largely on cream-cheese and grilled bonito, and winding up with coffee and Burmese hubble-bubbles, on the balcony.

"How long have you been here, inconsequent one?" I asked, after a glance down the moonlit road below us.

"Three days," replied Aylmer, between puffs.

"Ah! and I suppose you've no particular plans or projects?"

"Neither particular, nor general, nor any other. Is thy servant a bagman, that you should—Hullo! By Jove! that's quaint."

"What's quaint?"

"Why, those two men, walking over there with the woman—Amie!"

Aylmer turned his head, and spoke to the girl who was removing our dinner things.

Speaking in the *patois*, he asked who the people walking down the road might be. Amie could not tell the names, and referred to the individuals in question, as the English who lived over the hill in a certain big bungalow.

"Ah! we will call on these English to-morrow, Amigo," said Aylmer, turning again to me.

"By all means," I said; and then, remembering that people whom Aylmer thought quaint were sure to have a history, I added, "Tell me everything about them, from birth onward; I'm certain you know them."

Aylmer smiled, and dropping his hubbub, lighted a cheroot.

"No; or at least only by sight. Only as you know them."

"I? Pardon! I think not."

"You were in Las Palmas sometime in '85, were you not?"

"Even so."

"Well, don't you remember the two mysterious fellows with the beautiful wives, who stayed, when on the island, at the Belle Respiro?"

"You don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I do; should have known 'em a mile off; particularly the fair one."

"Well, what's their story, anyhow?"

"Ah, there you touch on a moving tale, chapters of which are Greek to me, and the rest of which came to me second-hand. Bottled caviare, my friend, and uninteresting. I'm not up in the details."

"Give me a rough outline—and a cheroot, if you have one."

Aylmer handed me the last-named commodity readily, and, as I took my first long drink of clean smoke from it, began to dole out pieces of the first thing I had asked for.

"Well, to begin with, Lumley and Farren courted their wives on principles hitherto peculiar to Browning's lover of 'Porphyria,' and a few others. The girls had a dozen suitors—they were sisters, you know—and gave them all turn and turn about at the different phases of love-making. It happened that our friends' turn for the warmest episode, the girls' confession of preference, came to each on the same evening. They met later on, in a conservatory, and, after mutual confidences, decided to retire on a winning game—to leave the town and the girls, since they had experienced the maximum of bliss which could be attained; an

admission of preference. The men left, and the sisters were so startled that they followed and married Lumley and Farren as soon as they found them. That was in San Remo, in the Arnay year, when Eric Vanburgh disappeared. I told you about his affair, when we were on *La Belle Aurore*, didn't I?"

I nodded, but refrained from further interruption; and Aylmer, continuing, said—

"Well, I can't give you all the details of what followed their disappearance from Canary, or what caused their presence here. The first are too numerous, and the second I don't know. All I do know I learnt from a beautifully blackguard Arab sailor, who was employed on a certain yacht, in which Lumley and Farren last left Africa. When they left, the Arab sailor remained. I met him afterwards, by chance, in Tangiers.

"You know that Canary Island interests, in these two men and their wives, hinged largely on the halo of things unexplained which hung round them. They would arrive at Las Palmas in their little yacht, and put up at the 'Belle Respiro' for five or six weeks. Then they would sail away again, and no one knew why or to

where. Now, I know that the 'where' was a little town called Arkoum, on the north-west coast of Africa, and the 'why' was slave-trading."

"Nonsense!"

"So I thought," continued Aylmer, "but it wasn't. Their business—and a very snug one, too—was simply ordinary slave-dealing, with two distinctive features. They stole their slaves instead of buying them, and sold them to buyers of feminine loveliness instead of to employers of labour. What, not marketable? Pooh! Ask old Tewk Pasha, their leading customer in Constantinople. More marketable than fiction, my friend. You try it. That was their business; and even the little glimpse you had of their way of living in Canary might show you that they made it pay. Well, now, feminine loveliness is less frequently to be found amongst the families of water-carriers than in the camps of chiefs, or even in the houses of Arab merchants. Lumley and Farren had two methods of stock-purchasing: Love-making (they spoke every North African *patois*) and forcible stratagem. After any particularly important purchase of stock, they would lie low and rusticate luxuriously in Las Palmas for a while."

Aylmer paused, and raised his slippered feet to the creeper-covered balcony rail.

"There came a certain day when all sorts of queer things were being whispered about the streets of Arkoum, and passers-by directed curious glances at the courtyard of the partners' little Moorish bungalow. An aged Mohammedan spat on the porch gate as he passed, and a dog belonging to Lumley was killed in the street. Also there were official rumours. Late that night the partners left the port for Canary, not in their own yacht, which to blind the curious was put in dry-dock, but in a trading schooner. If the Arkoum atmosphere became normal they were to return; if not, their wives were shortly to follow, with the firm's store of valuables. There are no banks in Arkoum.

"Three anxious days in Las Palmas town, and then a message from over the sea. An Arab, who once had been Lumley's servant, presented himself at the 'Belle Respiro.' He had come, he said, to save his old master's honour. Ab Sheybán, of Teheran, had plotted to steal the white men's wives, and burn their house, in just five days from that time. Ab Sheybán would undoubtedly do this thing. And—well,

the white men knew that Ab Sheybán's pearl of price, his daughter, of creamy skin and flowing curves like those of a desert horse's fore-leg when he walks—the pearl had for a year been Tewk Pasha's slave in the Turkish capital.

"There was no vessel leaving. The partners had only a limited amount of cash with them. What was to be done? The schooner in which he had journeyed from Arkoum was leaving for Teneriffe and elsewhere, said Lumley's old servant. That yacht near the break-water end? She with the black hull gold-striped? She was the yacht of a wealthy Algerian merchant, said the servant; and was just starting down the West Coast. The partners were sweeping the harbour with their glasses.

" 'Go aboard, Abdul,' said Lumley to the servant, 'and say—but wait; I will write a letter.'

"The owner of the yacht was ill and confined to his bunk. If the English would excuse him his duties as host, and make themselves at home on his yacht, he would remain always their debtor; whilst his standing in the hereafter, and his life in this world, would be made glorious from the moment of their consent to allow him to convey them to the port of

Arkoum. The partners were used to conferring these sorts of benefits on Moorish mankind, and inside of two hours were on their way to Africa, in the black yacht with the gold-barred hull. Their host was too ill to receive their thanks on arrival at Arkoum. But a minute after their departure he was in earnest converse with a big, full-blooded negro from the shore.

"The wives of the Christian dogs, were they secured? asked the white-bearded proprietor of the yacht. They were then in waiting, bound hand and foot, in things like covered palanquins. The old chief's white moustache trembled. Good! The women were brought on board, and stowed away in a cabin. Now, had the authorities been warned of the partners' return? Yes! The negro thought all things were as his master wished.

"Two hours afterwards, Lumley and Farren were dragged through the streets of Arkoum by ragged Arab soldiers, and pelted and jeered at by a still more ragged Arab mob. They had not found their wives, but they had found a guard of soldiers authorised to arrest them. Then, at the doors of the Arkoum Court-house, came a fresh development. One half the rabble

suddenly became a rescue party. In the midst of a blinding, deafening tornado of thick, yellow dust, hoarsely-yelling Arab madmen, yelping, snapping dogs, screaming women, and blazing gas-pipe barrel Arab muskets; Farren and Lumley were torn from the soldiery, hustled away from the Court-house, and whirled on to the deck of the black yacht with a gold stripe.

"Just as, to the distraction of one half the frenzied mob ashore, her great creamy sails filled, and she began to cut her way out beyond the breaker-line; just then, when Farren and Lumley, sitting by her teak-wood rail, breathless and bruised, found themselves the centre of a knot of armed Arab sailors; then, their host stepped up, and, with an ironically low bow, informed them that their wives were quite safe and in his own cabin. Of course it was Ab Sheybán, by the sale of whose beautiful daughter the partners had made half a year's income. Also of course, the partners assumed that their end would be 'something lingering, with boiling oil in it.'"

Aylmer paused to light a cigarette.

"Thus much I know," he continued, "from what my blackguard sailor told me; he who

remained behind, and could almost see this much from the shore. What followed, and how the Dickens they came here, to live in a big house over the hill, we may find out when we call at that house to-morrow. Meanwhile, 'Let's to the Prado, and make the most of time.'"

We did find out a good deal during the next and subsequent days, at the "big house over the hill," where the two partners lived with their beautiful wives; but—— Well, the house is there still, and I have broken bread there.

THE END

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